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ABSTRACT

This report explores the insights and experiences of activists who build strong constituencies to reform public schools. It presents data from a 2-year study involving the seven primary constituency and coalition building grantees of the Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative. Data were collected from 14 diverse local sites. Part I reports on the participants' views of their work; their goals, strategies, and challenges; and their achievements. Chapters include an introduction that discusses public school reform in historical context and constituency building for public school reform; (2) "Goals, Principles, and Challenges of Constituency Building"; and (3) "Role and Impact of Constituency Building for School Reform" (e.g., creating political will and holding public education institutions accountable and changing roles, relationships, and power dynamics). Part II describes the major tasks of constituency building and includes the following: (4) "Defining the Territory"; (5) "Fostering Collective Action" (e.g., developing a sense of collectivity and promoting local leadership); (6) "Building on Diversity" (e.g., bridging diversity and adding value and working strategically with diversity); (7) "Addressing Inside/Outside Dynamics" (e.g., definitions of insiders and outsiders and common characteristics of inside/outside work); (8) "Shifting Power" (e.g., building relationships for shared power and broadening the power base through coalitions); and (9) "Meeting Organizational Challenges" (e.g., interplay of principles and operations and the role of national and regional organizations). Throughout the report, case studies illustrate constituency building and reform work. (Contains 63 references.) (SM)

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Vital Voices

Building Constituencies for Public School Reform

Academy for Educational Development

Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

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2

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Vital Voices

Building Constituencies for Public School Reform

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A Report to the Ford Foundation

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are pleased to acknowledge the many people who took part in the creation of this report. First among them are the 21 study participants, listed below, who participated in discussions and interviews throughout the two-year study and carefully commented on earlier versions of the report. We are grateful to them for sharing their expertise and insights shaped over many years of work in building constituencies for quality, equitable schools for all children.

Janice Petrovich, Director of Education, Sexuality, Religion at the Ford Foundation, conceived of and directed the Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative. A major feature of the initiative was to share knowledge and experiences among participants and with the broader field. This report is part of the effort to learn from the initiative's grantees and their colleagues. We are grateful for the Foundation's support and for her substantive input.

Jean Thomases worked alongside us throughout the study to articulate the questions that would stimulate discussion and to analyze the many perspectives we heard. During the writing process, she demonstrated the value of a critical friend. Her considerable experience and insight helped shape this work in many important ways.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword i

Part I: Overview

Chapter 1: Introduction 3

Public School Reform in Historical Context 4

Challenges To Achieving Quality, Equitable Public Education 4

Constituency Building for Public School Reform 5

The Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative 6

The Constituency Building Study 7

The Report 8

Chapter 2: Goals, Principles, and Challenges of Constituency Building 11

Long-Term Constituency-Building Goals for Public School Reform 11

Underlying Principles of Constituency Building for School Reform 13

Challenges To Building Constituencies for Public School Reform 14

Chapter 3: Role and Impact of Constituency Building for School Reform 17

Building Understanding and a Sense of Shared Interest in Quality, Equitable Schools 17

Creating Political Will and Holding Public Education Institutions Accountable 21

Changing Roles, Relationships, and Power Dynamics 24

The Context for the Work: School Reform and Communities 28

Part II: The Work

Chapter 4: Defining the Territory 33

Chapter 5: Fostering Collective Action 37

From Individual to Member of a Group 38

Developing a Sense of Collectivity 40

Using Data 43

Developing "Stayers" 45

Promoting Local Leadership 46

Chapter 6: Building on Diversity 49

Practicing Inclusion: The Broad Range of "Diversity" 49

Bridging Diversity and Adding Value 51

Working Strategically with Diversity 53

The Challenge of Achieving Equitable Participation 55

Chapter 7: Addressing Inside/Outside Dynamics 57

Definitions of Insiders and Outsiders 58

Reasons To Bridge the Inside/Outside Divide in Education 59

Common Characteristics of Inside/Outside Work 60

Challenges of Inside/Outside Work 62

Chapter 8: Shifting Power 67

Building Relationships for Shared Power 68

Relating to the Powers That Be: Principals as One Example 70

Broadening the Power Base through Coalitions 73

Asserting Individual Rights 76

Establishing New Governance Policies 77

Chapter 9: Meeting Organizational Challenges 81

Interplay of Principles and Operations 81

Constant Change, Experimentation, and Renewal 82

The Role of National and Regional Organizations 86

Part III: Conclusion

Chapter 10: Conclusion 93

Appendices

Appendix A: Profiles of Participating Organizations 97

Appendix B: Notes on the Study Design 107

Appendix C: Bibliography 109

Copies of this report and the accompanying executive summary are available free from the Academy for Educational Development, 100 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011. The documents also are available in PDF format at www.aed.org/scs (see publications) and at www.chapin.uchicago.edu.

FOREWORD

In 1995, the Ford Foundation launched the Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative. The initiative was grounded in a research-based conclusion: For school reform to occur, reach significant scale, and be sustained over time, an informed and mobilized public is required. During the early 1990s, many promising initiatives to reform schools failed to take hold because school leadership changed and each successive leader brought in a reform "du jour." Even court orders, such as those requiring localities to reform their school finance systems, were only unevenly implemented. Research has demonstrated that the presence of a well-informed, mobilized public, able to hold institutions accountable, typically made the difference in identifying appropriate interventions and ensuring their successful implementation. Given this context, the Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative was developed at the Foundation with the goal of increasing civic capacity and engagement to promote high-quality education for all students. The premise was that for educational policy to be effective, the public needs solid data on what works (research); effective dissemination of that information (communications); and organizations that can connect people, establish consensus, and mobilize them to act (constituency building). Grants for the Ford Foundation initiative supported all three kinds of activities and sought ways to network participants to promote greater impact.

In the decade before the Foundation launched the initiative, the President, governors, and corporate CEOs had become increasingly convinced that "programmatic tinkering" had not led to sustainable reforms of sufficient scale. New education reform alternatives were being developed, including "break the mold" school models, curriculum standards, market models of education reform, and the increasing implementation of high-stakes tests. For example, in 1993 Ambassador Walter Annenberg committed $500 million to create "break the mold" schools that could inspire the transformation of other public schools. This announcement was made on the White House lawn at the invitation of President George Herbert Walker Bush, a self-proclaimed "education president." Political leaders joined with corporate leaders in summit meetings to discuss ways to improve public schools, and governors identified education as their priority arenas for policy change.

The movement to create standards for what children should learn went into full swing in the 1990s, and many donors supported those initiatives. Efforts to privatize service delivery for public schools were growing at a fast pace as a way to increase efficiency and decrease cost. For-profit public schools were created. The private sector and even the military were becoming popular sources of new educational leaders and teachers. Charter schools were becoming part of the discussion about public school improvement and they also won their set of supporters among the funding community. Some donors backed more deliberate plans to privatize education by supporting voucher strategies as a way to create competition in the public school system. Meanwhile, the educational achievement lag of racial/ethnic minority students, poor students, and those living in the inner cities or in the rural areas grew during the 1990s. There was growing evidence that segregation was increasing around the country.

In sum, the education reform focus that began in the 1990s, and continues to this day, centers largely on designing mechanisms to increase administrative efficiency and standards, create school models to demonstrate good practice, and spur competition between schools to create an incentive for improvement. These reforms envision schools as products in an educational marketplace where students and parents are consumers. This change model can be summarized roughly as follows: New "products" (new models) created according to exacting standards are needed to spur imitation. Charter schools and vouchers provide students and parents, as consumers, with the ability to choose between schools. As a result, schools seek to improve in order to compete for students. Finally, testing provides the quality control in this paradigm of reform.

The Ford Foundation's interest in helping to create excellent public schools is coupled with a social justice agenda that promotes an equitable education system. Equity and social justice are central to all of the fields and geographic locations in which the Foundation works. Much of Foundation grant making in education

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aims to help people at the margins of society gain access to high-quality schools and colleges. The Foundation's ultimate goal in the field of education is thus to help create the conditions for vibrant and equitable democratic societies. This means seeking to foster a well-educated citizenry capable of holding public institutions accountable to the common good. This approach aims to maximize the democratic process by which communities are linked to schools as a way of ensuring that excellent schools are available for *all,* not just some, students. A vital strategy for making education more equitable and effective, and fulfilling the promise of democracy, entails building well-informed constituencies for reform.

The Foundation seeks to invest in *systemic* solutions that hold the promise of large-scale change. In the field of education, Foundation funds support projects that seek to improve schools both from the "inside," through better-trained teachers, principals, and superintendents, and from the "outside," through activities to establish a supportive environment surrounding schools. Funds support efforts to train a new generation of leaders and scholars who can effectively chart their societies' futures. The Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative represents a significant part of the Foundation's investments in understanding and supporting policies and practices that help all children achieve, and in promoting public support for public schools. These investments aim to help create a supportive environment for education through policies that promote equity and excellence and a well-informed public that can mobilize to ensure that these objectives are met and sustained. This initiative was premised on the understanding that educational systems can and should seek to achieve both excellence and equity.

From the onset, the initiative sought to maximize learning. Grantee convenings were an important way to inform and enhance their developing work. Research findings have been published in journals, presented at conferences, posted on Web sites, and discussed in print and visual media. A book containing the results of supported research is due to be published by Teachers College Press in 2004. Another publication *(The Donors' Education Collaborative: Strategies for Systemic School Reform)* was produced by Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago to document lessons gleaned from a New York-based Foundation investment in support of building constituencies for public school reform. The majority of grantees created Web pages and some established listservs as ways to share what they were learning and inform the public about education issues.

This publication represents an example of the Ford Foundation's investment in efforts to build knowledge about effective school reform. Through a grant to the Academy for Educational Development and the Chapin Hall Center, Foundation grantees and affiliates spent substantial time discussing their strategies, successes, and challenges in working to create civic capacity for public school reform. These organizations, which have realized strong achievements, share a common aspiration of excellent public schools for all children. Throughout, they demonstrate the critical importance of building knowledgeable, active constituencies in catalyzing and sustaining meaningful change. Although their modes of work vary, the research process surfaced significant commonalities in their strategies and outcomes. I believe this is because all of these organizations seek to bring the public into public schools and thus to strengthen our democratic system, which relies on effective citizen participation.

As this publication goes to print, the world is still reeling from the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001. Our nation has embarked on a war that has created enormous demands on public resources. States are strapped for funds and school budgets are feeling the crunch. A well-informed and engaged public is sorely needed to set public priorities that strengthen our democracy. Those interested in the complex and difficult work of engaging citizens should find much to gain from the collective learning summarized in this report.

Janice Petrovich
Director of Education, Sexuality, Religion
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9 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Part I

Overview

Introduction

Public schools represent a central institution in the lives of families and communities in America. Many people say that public schools *per se*, good or poor, are essential for the practice of democracy. At the least, these schools play a pivotal role in the economic strength of the country. **In addition, as our society becomes not only more complex but also more fragmented, schools, along with few other institutions, can provide common ground, cutting across racial, class, ethnic, language, immigrant, and other social groupings and bringing people together around a common purpose.**

This report explores and builds on the experiences and insights of activists who build strong constituencies to reform public schools. These activists aim to engage and support parents, community members, educators, businesspeople, and others in creating school systems that provide quality, equitable education for all children.

In joining constituency-building and education reform efforts, these study participants forge strategies that deepen and promote both. The core tenets of their work are:

- All children can learn to high standards. This assertion specifically includes those who often are ill-served by public education, such as those who are poor, immigrant, English language learners, or members of racial and ethnic minorities.
- Communities bear both the right and the responsibility to foster and protect quality, equitable educational opportunities for their children.
- A democratic society provides the tools for constituents to participate in shaping, monitoring, and sustaining the policies and practices of the major public institutions that affect the lives of communities, families, and individuals. These tools include the rights of assembly, representation, freedom of speech, and access to information, and the use of the courts as well as the ballot.

Never before have public education reformers, as well as many educators, legislators, and policymakers, set a goal as high as quality, equitable education for all children. Moreover, never before have education activists, communities, and others linked the accomplishment of such aims with an insistence on the joint authority and responsibility of professional educators, policymakers, communities, students, and parents to participate together in deciding on the policies and practices necessary to meet those aims. This insistence requires meaningful roles for and accountability from all stakeholder groups.

Striving for Equity

A common legal definition of educational equity is equal access to the full range of quality programs and provision of the services needed to succeed in those programs. Study discussions reveal that participants' concept of equity includes equal access and needed services, but goes beyond these basics to encompass two other areas as well. The first is equality of voice, in which all students and their families can participate fully in decision-making. The second area encompasses educational content and teaching methods that reflect the diverse backgrounds, needs, and interests of students.

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Public School Reform in Historical Context

Americans always have called on public education to help realize their images of their country. Reform of education and reform of the larger society have been intertwined from the start. Americans have expected public schools to take center stage in educating former slaves, integrating immigrant children into society, fighting racism and segregation, reducing poverty, promoting public health, and building strong communities. In a parallel way, public education has been relied upon to help meet the challenges of shifting demographics, developing technologies, emerging global competitors, and changing world ecologies. Yet despite the significant alignment between the ambitious goals Americans have for their education system and those they have for their society, efforts to meet these objectives often have been incomplete and only partially successful.

In the introduction to their edited volume *Reconstructing the Common Good in Public Education: Coping with Intractable American Dilemmas,* Larry Cuban and Dorothy Shipps make the point that, with the start of public education, "Americans expected that their public schools — the common school as it was initially called — would build citizens, cultivate the moral and social development of individual students, and bind diverse groups into one nation."[1] The children who attended early public schools were a selected lot. Nevertheless, these expectations continued to resonate over time, even as schools became more inclusive. In the mid-1800s, the authors find that public school goals continued to include developing basic literacy, strengthening moral character, and building responsible citizens. Then, in the late 1800s, with the end of the Civil War, public education encountered "the monumental task of transforming four million ex-slaves into literate citizens. In ex-Confederate states, the federal government provided free public schooling for millions of black children and adults, thus forging linkages for the first time between federal action and locally controlled schools and between race and citizenship. Again, education and the common good were assumed to be closely linked. This experiment … lasted only a decade, leaving the issues of a federal role in schooling and educating poor, minority children unaddressed for another century."[2]

Early in the 20th century, Cuban and Shipps argue, public schools were expected to help meet the needs of an industrial economy, fostering the growth of vocational education, as well as to help resolve the social needs of a nation now home to immigrants from many different countries. "[M]ore than before, public schools were expected to Americanize newcomers and produce vocationally skilled graduates who could fill skilled jobs in the industrial workforce." Late in the century, both schools and society faced seemingly relentless "hard-core problems of poverty, social stratification, and racial inequities … ." Moreover, basic literacy was no longer enough in the technologically changed workplace. Students graduated but without the skills necessary to find satisfying jobs, and schools could not meet the demand for qualified workers. By the 1980s, a growing fear that the United States was losing ground in the world economy "fuel[ed] wave after wave of unrelenting criticism of schools."[3]

With the turn of the century, there has been increasing pressure for schools to provide quality education, underscored by the move toward setting high standards against which every child will be measured. Despite the challenges of ensuring high-quality teaching, equitable opportunity to learn, meaningful standards, and fair means of assessment, many educators and public school advocates, although not all, view the standards movement as a chance to promote excellence in education. At the same time, many people favor privatization and specialized responses, such as vouchers, for-profit schools, and charter schools, to meet the demand for educational excellence. Still, extending the observation of Cuban and Shipps, "the popular commitment to public schooling, albeit eroded and brittle, remains durable."[4]

Challenges To Achieving Quality, Equitable Public Education

The public school activists who participated in the current study share ambitious aims and multiple challenges. Undeniably, for many children and in many neighborhoods, both rural and urban, schools are not meeting basic educational needs. Visibly deteriorated school facilities, lack of up-to-date learning tools, overcrowded classrooms, too few qualified teachers, growing disenchantment with the promise of public education,

and the highly politicized and often divisive arenas within which education policies are decided comprise only the most obvious troubles plaguing public education. By high school, regular attendance is problematic and dropout rates are high in many places. Too many young people leave school with little preparation for meaningful and productive roles in our highly complex, bureaucratic, and technologically advanced society.

In addition, schools carry perhaps an even greater burden in the modern era than in the past. Children and youth in the United States, as a group, increasingly come from immigrant families and diverse racial, sociocultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, they live in a society where the gap is growing between the top and bottom economic classes, the number of manufacturing and other traditional blue-collar jobs is decreasing, the population is aging, and technology is rapidly changing the occupational landscape. Many of public schools' most poorly served children come from low-income and racial and ethnic minority families; some of these children spend their entire educational careers in chronically failing schools. All participants in the study recognize the inequities of public education as it is practiced today. Some of these activists bring a particular equity lens to their constituency-building and public school reform work, addressing the urgent educational needs of African American, Latino, and other ill-served populations.

In this context, teachers, principals, and education policymakers often feel beleaguered and blamed, struggling to offer educational opportunities but without the facilities, tools, fiscal backing, and other supports necessary. At times, schools turn in on themselves, establishing and defending a closed arena against their critics. **Yet, study participants argue, it is not just educators who must take responsibility for schools; these pivotal institutions are and must be products of their communities.** This means, as Michele Cahill asserts, that the "definition of the school as a critical institution in the life of the community" must be reshaped to include the public — parents and other family and community members — in essential ways.[5] Such inclusion must occur even as the aims for public schools are pushed ever higher, as advocates, educators, community members, policymakers, and others increasingly demand educational excellence and equity for all children.

Constituency Building for Public School Reform

A growing number of public school advocates, funders, researchers, and scholars seek to further deep and sustainable school reform by fostering the meaningful participation of stakeholders in shaping education policy; by supporting links between schools and their communities; and by framing school reform within broad social, economic, and political contexts. These approaches build on the conviction that only the participation of all stakeholders in education decision-making will ensure sustained, systemic, and widespread reform. Only such participation will ensure representation and acknowledgment of the experiences and needs of all children in policy decisions. This is especially so for those who traditionally have been underrepresented — those living in poverty, members of racial and ethnic minorities, English language learners, immigrants, and others. **Central to such work is constituency building — helping to engage and bring constituencies to the policy table, developing the capacity of individuals and communities to undertake significant roles, and working to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of all groups with a stake in public education.**

Historically, school reform efforts have not taken into account the larger roles of schools in their communities, let alone worked to engage the many groups with an interest in education. Instead, school reform typically has focused on creating change within schools, and to a great extent many current efforts continue this focus. Yet even within this limited scope, reform efforts often have been unable to address all relevant issues simultaneously, trying, for example, "to alter the behavior of professionals without doing very much about the structures in which they work, or … concentrat[ing] on structural reforms with little attention to the interests of the professionals who work within the system."[6] As another social analyst points out, since the mid-1980s such efforts have focused on standards, teachers' salaries, teaching, curriculum, governance, and assessment, but never on connecting school reform with social trends, changing demographics, and other community developments.[7] Still others argue that "[i]vory tower reform efforts" to improve education generally are doomed from the start because they neglect the fact that "[e]ducation policy is conceived, modified, and enacted in the political arena."[8]

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The groups and individuals who participated in this study believe that **active and meaningful participation of broad constituencies is essential for relevant, effective, equitable, and sustainable reform.** Research bears this out. In 1998, for example, Marilyn Gittell explained differences in efforts to decentralize decision-making in New York City in 1967 and Chicago in 1989 "as a product of the ability of city stakeholders to coalesce and advance their interests at the state level."[9] In Chicago, community organizations took the lead in "initiating and sustaining coalition politics," engaging "traditional civic groups, political officials, and the business establishment as activist partners in the reform agenda."[10] This effort resulted in state-legislated, elected local school councils, composed of parents, teachers, and community representatives, with the authority to hire principals, allocate budgets, and design school improvement plans. In contrast, despite mayoral, gubernatorial, and philanthropic support for decentralization in New York City, union opposition and lack of grassroots support resulted in far weaker legislation and elected district school boards that were empowered only to hire the school superintendent.

Even when reform has been mandated legislatively or judicially, constituency building has played a critical role by involving informed stakeholders as participants, supporters, watchdogs, and monitors. Thus, during the more than 10 years of implementing the Kentucky Education Reform Act, an important aspect of the Prichard Committee's work has been building and maintaining knowledge, engagement, and support among parents, community members, residents, businesspeople, journalists, and policymakers. Moreover, there are indications that reforms stemming from judicial and legislative mandates are less likely to succeed without the continuous push and support of engaged constituencies. In a comparative study of four school districts under court order to dismantle tracking, Kevin Welner finds that political mobilization is necessary to translate such mandates into school change.[11] In another instance, Michael Rebell and Robert Hughes review the repercussions of school-desegregation and fiscal-equity court rulings, finding that constituent involvement is critical to shaping and implementing effective remedies.[12]

The Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative

The Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative aimed to create lasting systemic change through the responsible activity of public education's multiple stakeholders. The initiative, begun in 1995 as a five-year program, brought together three components of reform work — coalition and constituency building, policy research and evaluation, and public information and communications — in an effort to engage, inform, and involve the broad range of education stakeholders in the policymaking process. Many of these constituencies have been routinely excluded from meaningful participation in education decision-making.

The initiative supported work in the three component areas. Grantees in the initiative's policy research and evaluation component collect, evaluate, and analyze data regarding the outcomes of school-reform policies and practices. Grantees in the public information and communications component aim to inform the public broadly about educational policies and practices, and stimulate stakeholder involvement in improving public education. Finally, grantees at the center of the initiative, in the constituency- and coalition-building category, operate at the grassroots, state, and national levels to engage parents, educators, business leaders, and other community members in efforts to reform public education policy and practice.

Throughout the initiative, the foundation provided all grantees with opportunities to interact, share knowledge, and support each other's efforts. For example, twice a year the foundation hosted convenings at which grantees learned about each other's work; heard research reports as well as updates on litigation for school finance equity; participated in technical assistance activities; and discussed and debated topics such as high-stakes testing, standards-based education, and public engagement strategies. The meetings allowed grantees to interact with peers from across the country, from rural as well as urban areas, and from across disciplines and approaches to constituency building. One result of the initiative has been ongoing exchange among

grantees and organizations, as participants continue to share information; act as advisors, resources, conference participants, and board members; and collaborate in joint undertakings. This kind of informed practice, drawing on research, advocacy, constituency-building, and communications perspectives, serves to sharpen the aims and strategies of each discipline while fostering a national network of activist colleagues.

The Constituency Building Study

The Academy for Educational Development and Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago worked with the seven primary constituency- and coalition-building grantees of the initiative. Although this group represents a small portion of school reform activists across the country, the members may be considered among the leading constituency builders for school reform. The two-year research endeavor, which began in early 1999, provided a forum where reformers could share and examine their collective knowledge of, experience with, and insights into the work of building, mobilizing, and sustaining constituency engagement. Participating grantees — largely national, regional, or statewide organizations that provide centralized support for local organizations — included Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, the Interfaith Education Fund, the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, Parents for Public Schools, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, the Public Education Network, and the 21st Century School Fund.

Primary data collection was conducted through a team composed of, along with the researchers, one representative from each of the seven initiative grantees

Constituency Building Study: Study Team Members

Ford Foundation CBPSRI grantees and affiliates (grantees in italics)	Representatives
Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, Chicago, IL	Anne C. Hallett
Chicago ACORN, Chicago, IL	Madeline Talbott
Philadelphia Education Fund, Philadelphia, PA	Rochelle Nichols Solomon
Interfaith Education Fund, Austin, TX	Carrie Laughlin
Austin Interfaith, Austin, TX	Claudia Santamaria
The Metropolitan Organization, Houston, TX	Joe Higgs
National Coalition of Advocates for Students, Boston, MA	Joan First
California Tomorrow, Oakland, CA	Laurie Olsen
Intercultural Development Research Association, San Antonio, TX	Aurelio Montemayor
Parents for Public Schools, Jackson, MS	Kelly Allin Butler
Parents for Public Schools Rural Initiative, Fountain, NC	Amina Shahid-El
Parents for Public Schools of Jackson, Jackson, MS	Charles Lindsay
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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation, Charlotte, NC	Tom Bradbury
Portland Public Schools Foundation, Portland, OR	Cynthia Guyer
21st Century School Fund, Washington, DC	Mary Filardo
Senior High Alliance of Principals, Presidents, and Educators, Washington, DC	Cathy Reilly
Washington Parent Group Fund, Washington, DC	Jerald Woody, Sr.

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and one representative from each of 14 local sites (each grantee selected two affiliated sites). As can be seen, these 21 representatives work in diverse places, through different kinds of organizations, on various public school issues, and with a range of constituents. Yet all strive to build strong constituencies for school reform. Collectively, they have experience in rural and urban areas in California, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington, D.C. They act in a variety of settings — from school districts with reform-oriented, parent-friendly administrations to districts that discount parent engagement and propose to dismantle local school councils — and with a spectrum of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, principals, community members, business leaders, city and state officials, and teacher union members. The organizations for which these constituency builders work range in size from groups with no paid staff to those with multimillion dollar budgets. One group was formed three years ago; another just celebrated its 27th year. Collectively, the study team had hundreds of years of school reform experience in a wide variety of stakeholder roles, including those of parent; educator; organizer; advocate; convener; parent trainer/coach; researcher; and director of a local, state, or national organization.

The Constituency Building Study aimed to develop an overview of the landscape of constituency building — its approaches, achievements, challenges, and lessons — grounded in practitioners' experiences and insights. To accomplish this, the study created venues for dialogue among peers about the issues of building constituencies and derived lessons from the exchange and one-on-one interviews. The study was not designed to develop consensus among participants, nor to assess particular practices or goals. Instead, discussions were geared to bring to light often-unarticulated assumptions and expectations, differing as well as shared strategies and goals, and unexpected challenges and responses.[13] Through the study, the researchers hope to help stimulate a broad conversation about constituency building for school reform and to further understanding in the field.[14]

The Report

The report identifies pivotal values, tasks, and challenges of constituency building, as well as some of the many promising approaches and accomplishments of participants. The analysis is based primarily on participants' experiences and insights; at the same time, it looks across individual statements to identify larger commonalities and differences that mark the work. In addition, the researchers draw on the growing body of literature on the topic to help place the work of these practitioners in a meaningful context.

The report has three major parts. The first frames the study's findings and explores the role, values, importance, and impact of constituency building as part of school reform. The second part focuses on the major aspects of constituency-building work, including critical tasks, issues, strategies, and challenges. Throughout the text, study participants emphasize efforts to help constituents develop and exercise their power to make quality, equitable schools. Chapter 8, entitled "Shifting Power," describes strategies for changing power relationships and interactions, building on earlier discussions in "Fostering Collective Action" (Chapter 5), "Building on Diversity" (Chapter 6), and "Addressing Inside/Outside Dynamics" (Chapter 7). The report concludes by highlighting some of the main issues and lessons of constituency building. Woven into the text are examples of promising school reform/constituency-building practices and accomplishments, along with participants' analyses of what makes for effective constituency building. Although these accounts are just a few of the many shared over the course of the study, they illustrate the broad reach of constituency-building activity in shaping policy and practice — at the state, district, school, and classroom levels — regarding issues such as standards, governance, funding, facilities, and curriculum.

[1] Cuban, Larry, and Dorothy Shipps, eds., *Reconstructing the Common Good in Education: Coping with Intractable American Dilemmas*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 1.

[2] Cuban and Shipps, pp. 2–3.

[3] Cuban and Shipps, pp. 3–4.

[4] Cuban and Shipps, p. 4.

[5] Cahill, Michele, *Schools and Community Partnerships: Reforming Schools, Revitalizing Communities*, a Schools and Community Working Paper, Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 1996, p. iii.

[6] Katz, Michael B., *Improving Poor People: The Welfare State, the "Underclass," and Urban Schools as History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 122.

[7] Shirley, Dennis, *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*, Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1997, p. 2.

[8] Gittell, Marilyn, and Laura McKenna, "Introduction: The Ends and the Means in Education Policy." in Gittell, Marilyn J., ed., *Strategies for School Equity: Creating Productive Schools in a Just Society*, New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 2.

[9] Gittell, Marilyn, "School Reform in New York and Chicago: Revisiting the Ecology of Local Games," in *Strategies for School Equity: Creating Productive Schools in a Just Society*, p. 147.

[10] Gittell, School Reform, p. 151.

[11] Welner, Kevin G., *Legal Rights, Local Wrongs: When Community Control Collides with Educational Equity*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001.

[12] Rebell, Michael A., and Robert L. Hughes, "Efficacy and Engagement: The Remedies Problem Posed by *Sheff v. O'Neill* — and Proposed Solution," in *Connecticut Law Review*, University of Connecticut, 29:3 (spring 1997), pp. 1154, 1156.

[13] Appendix B describes the aims, methodology, and challenges of the study itself.

[14] The year 2002 marked the publication of a number of studies, supported in part by the Ford Foundation, that variously examine, map, and make a case for the practices and role of constituency-building and organizing efforts in effecting public school reform. In addition to the present study, these studies include Chapin Hall Center for Children's six-year evaluation of the Donors' Education Collaborative's Initiative to create systemic reform of public education in New York City. See Janice Hirota, Robin Jacobowitz, and Prudence Brown, *The Donors' Education Collaborative: Strategies for Systemic School Reform*, Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2000, which analyzes projects' constituency-building and policy work after four years of implementation. The report is available from Chapin Hall Center for Children, 1313 E. 60th St., Chicago, IL 60637 and on its Web site at www.chapin.uchicago.edu.

Cross City Campaign's Indicators Project on Education Organizing examines the roles and results of community organizing in reforming schools and explores indices of success in education organizing. See Gold, Eva, and Elaine Simon (Research for Action), and Chris Brown (Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform), *Successful Community Organizing for School Reform*, part of a series entitled *Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools: The Indicators Project on Education Organizing*, Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 2002. The report is available from Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 407 S. Dearborn, Ste. 1500, Chicago, IL 60605 and on its Web site at www.crosscity.org.

The Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University, California Tomorrow, Designs for Change, and Southern Echo conducted a study to examine the methods and approaches of 66 community groups organizing to improve schools in eight sites across the country. See Mediratta, Kavitha, Norm Fruchter, and Anne C. Lewis, *Organizing for School Reform: How Communities are Finding Their Voice and Reclaiming Their Public Schools*, New York: Institute for Education and Social Policy, 2002. The report is available from the Institute for Education and Social Policy, 726 Broadway, 5th Fl., New York, NY 10003 and on its Web site at www.nyu.edu/iesp.

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CHAPTER TWO

Goals, Principles, and Challenges of Constituency Building

Constituency building, simply put, aims to help constituents make their voices heard in the institutional policy decisions and practices that affect their lives. It seeks to leverage influence in the social, economic, and political spheres of community life. Social reform efforts have engaged relevant publics throughout American history, as in the various policy-reform efforts of early settlement-house workers, temperance marchers, and suffragettes, as well as the mobilization of mass constituencies by labor unionists and civil-rights activists. Constituency building is deliberately inclusive in its strategies; it may entail activities that range from informing, involving, and gaining the support of organizations and individuals regarding a particular issue to long-term, intensive community organizing around multiple issues. Participants in this study view constituency building as an approach that can be and is used by advocates across the political spectrum, including those with goals very different from their own.

Yet certain distinctions mark the constituency-building work of the public school advocates featured in this study. These activists see this work not only as a central strategy of their reform efforts, but as the framework that defines those efforts. **For them, constituency building, with its faith in and reliance upon democratic assumptions and processes, reflects a commitment to the right and responsibility of communities to define the common good and work together to achieve it.** In the context of education reform, constituency building supports communities' efforts to participate actively in shaping the goals, practices, and policies of their schools. Therefore, it means building local individual and organizational capacity, fostering local leadership, engaging constituents poorly served by schools, and nurturing the will to take responsibility for educating all children in the community.

The research reveals that study participants share a set of core goals, adhere to certain principles, and encounter similar challenges. This chapter explores these common elements that shape the meaning of constituency building among these public school reformers. Chapter 4 explores points of departure — differences in approaches within these parameters.

Long-Term Constituency-Building Goals for Public School Reform

Overarching goals for study participants reflect the imperative of educating the nation's children to high standards, the deep conviction that constituents and communities must take active and ongoing roles in meeting that educational challenge, and a great faith in democratic practices and the power of organized action. These goals include the following:

Goal: Equitable, Quality Education for All Children

Study participants strive for equitable public education, and they define equity broadly (see page 3). For study participants and many others involved in education reform, constituency building especially calls for helping to raise the voices of those who traditionally have not been part of education discussions and decisions. Frequently these are low-income, minority, immigrant, or non-English-speaking families whose children attend ill-served, low-achieving schools. Some of the organizations involved in the study view constituency building and school reform mainly through an equity lens. This means, as the director of a statewide organization points out, "the nature of this work ... is focused on the voices of specific excluded communities." Study team members assert that these constituents' meaningful participation is key to achieving reform of and accountability among chronically failing schools.

For other study participants, "silent" stakeholders also may include, depending on local circumstances, other parents and community members who have little say in school governance or budgetary matters; employers with little input about educational needs; educators

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with little control over classroom scheduling, curriculum, or teaching methods; and students with no participation in creating or implementing school rules. The "public" in public schools means that all those with a stake in education are recognized as necessary and legitimate participants in ensuring equitable, quality public schools for all children. But for such engagement to happen, study participants acknowledge the importance of building constituencies with the knowledge and skills necessary to advance reform efforts.

Goal: Deep, Sustained, Ongoing Reform

Many children across the country lack quality public schooling. For far-reaching and sustainable reform to happen, knowledgeable observers of public education — including advocates, elected officials, school administrators, researchers, and participants in this study — say it must involve concerned constituents who act as watchdogs, advocates, monitors, and, as the head of a national education organization calls them, "active witnesses." Yet, for a variety of reasons, parents, students, business leaders, religious leaders, and other community members often do not take on such roles, especially as individuals. Even if a person, working alone, does take up the call, she is unlikely to set off change, at least at the systemic level.

Study participants help build the capacity of local constituents to take on these critical roles, create networks of constituents who can act in concert, and foster local organizations and organizational alliances that institutionalize such participation. Constituency building is essential to reform for a number of reasons. Large, bureaucratic, and often intractable school systems, particularly in urban areas, often move toward change only when prodded by organized advocates. Even strong leaders within education systems need constituents who can raise red flags when, for example, educational policy is hampered by narrow interests, budgetary constraints, or overreliance on standardized test results as measures of success.

At the same time, forces work against constituent engagement. Many school systems do not regularly share information about important issues such as assessment and placement practices, curricular decisions, achievement measures and progress, and budgetary decisions. The limited availability of data undermines meaningful participation. Moreover, many schools do not gather and analyze data in ways that would illuminate teaching and learning gaps, such as by disaggregating student achievement and promotion data. Still, parents and other community members often attribute professional expertise to schools and education personnel, an attribution that can underscore the class, racial, educational, and cultural differences between parents and educators. A common sense of isolation, a lack of access to school information, and the challenge of maneuvering within complex school bureaucracies and bewildering regulations represent enormous obstacles to constituent engagement. The situation leaves parents — and even educators — with little credibility or leverage in decision-making, whether at the classroom, local school, or systemic level. As a result, these constituents frequently leave decisions to policymakers, education staff, and elected officials, relinquishing their right and responsibility to help shape public education.

Study participants assert two basic, complementary assumptions. **First, they contend that education must be a matter of public concern and engagement that goes far beyond public funding.** Input from family and community members, businesspeople, and others — often considered "outsiders" by education policymakers — is, in fact, key to highlighting students' strengths and needs, pointing to systemic gaps and failures, bringing needed perspectives to governance, and linking communities with their schools. Constituents who are not employed by the school system are essential for assessing, demanding accountability from, and working with the system. **Second, study participants say that communities bear responsibility for their public institutions.** Failings in public education do not fall solely on the shoulders of professional educators and bureaucrats. Rather, communities must step forward to reclaim their schools and the education they provide.

Goal: Democracy in Practice

Study participants are committed to supporting constituent voices by using "the tools that a democratic system makes available ... [including] free speech, freedom of assembly, representative government, and many local laws and regulations that give us access to meetings in public, information, and decision-making." By enacting the values of participatory democracy, engaged

constituents demand a voice in and accept responsibility for public education.

An additional goal is to build constituency in ways that foster involvement in education decision-making, respect for diversity, development of local capacity and leadership, equity of opportunity, and democratic processes. Combining such values and challenges with organizational mission, reformers develop particular strategies and approaches for redressing specific issues. Part II of this report discusses some strategies and dilemmas in constituency building. Some study participants explicitly envision communities where residents ultimately extend their knowledge, skills, and leadership beyond education to other public institutions.

> *"The important part of voice is that it is only possible in a democratic system."*
>
> *— The director of a national organization*

Underlying Principles of Constituency Building for School Reform

Although study participants may use different frameworks and strategies, they share certain underlying principles. For example, a constituency builder may focus on an excluded population, such as a racial, ethnic, or language minority, or may seek to connect various social groups. In either instance, the effort includes an emphasis on developing and supporting local leaders. Similarly, the effort involves analyses of and efforts to shift power dynamics, as well as a tight focus on local issues, relationships, organizations, and networks. These themes are elaborated briefly below and more fully in chapters 5–8 of this report.

Principle: Developing Local Capacity and Leadership

Local capacity building is vital to enabling local constituencies and organizations to seize new roles and exert influence in the education arena. **Constituency building increases civic capacity when reformers aim to build individual and organizational knowledge and analytic ability, develop skills, support local leadership, and foster democratic participation and accountability.** In school reform efforts, this means building capacity to deal with often complex school issues such as budgets, building codes, and academic standards; interact successfully with school administrators and other policymakers; persuade others to support reform; and make decisions about reform plans and action strategies.

Increasingly, constituency building for public school reform also means intentionally building and strengthening mutually beneficial links between schools and their communities. Stakeholder capacity, initially built within the education arena, may eventually address other policy areas and public institutions as well.

Principle: Grounding the Work in Local Issues and Organizations

Study participants assert that constituency building, especially among parents and other community members, must be rooted locally, within arenas where trust and a sense of common purpose can be developed through face-to-face relationships, identification of local concerns, and joint action. This work can occur in various settings: within a local network of parents focused on reform in a particular school, within a group of organized immigrant community members, among parents and educators working together at the district level to define a vision for the school system, or among residents from across a state battling for increased education resources. In all instances, the web of local leaders, issues, and relationships not only provides the context for involving, training, and sustaining engagement, but also provides the means of promoting ongoing reform. For study participants, this network is most effective when it is developed through a local group independent of the school system, although often with support from a regional, state, or national organization.

Principle: Changing Roles and Relationships

Study participants help develop networks that can take on public roles and exert influence in the institutions and decisions that affect their communities. **This work is political because it seeks to open up the decision-making process, enlarge the circle of decision-makers, establish legitimacy for excluded groups, demand accountability, and reframe issues of debate.** Study participants have helped bring new constituencies — including parents, community

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members, business representatives, teachers, and others — to the decision-making table, supported constituents in assuming new public roles, demystified the use of data, and examined the political contexts of education. For all study participants, an intrinsic principle of constituency building is to shift relationships and power dynamics in decision-making, accountability, and the establishment of education policies and practices. For organizations with an equity perspective, the heart of the effort is "to change the exclusionary nature of public education," as one study participant observed.

Challenges To Building Constituencies for Public School Reform

Study group discussions and interviews reveal that activists typically encounter several challenges. In many ways, the kind of constituency building that study participants undertake — with its faith in democratic processes and its aim to change power dynamics — goes against the grain of contemporary social trends and deep-rooted practices. **By invoking one set of traditional values, principally equity, inclusiveness, and the common good, these activists often come up against another set of equally orthodox values, including individualism, freedom of choice, and marketplace mechanisms.** The work of constituency building — bringing together neighbors who are unacquainted, creating and supporting networks, defining common interests — reflects the pervasive reality of a fragmented, stratified, highly bureaucratized, individualistic, and competitive society. In addition, social contexts are constantly changing, a fact starkly documented in the 2000 U.S. Census. Together, contemporary trends, conflicting values, and changing social contexts pose large and complex challenges — briefly outlined below — for constituency builders.

Challenge: Finding Common Ground in a Highly Fragmented Society

Study participants' work focuses largely on fostering a sense of connection and mutual interest among constituents. These reformers work with and across groups of various races, ethnicities, cultures, income levels, languages, generations, religions, neighborhoods, and occupations. Yet it can be difficult to link individuals, whether *within* a group or *across* groups. At times, activists find it difficult to bring together people who are from similar ethnic communities but affiliated with different public schools. At other times, forging connections between parents and teachers in the local school, where parents are regarded as outsiders and teachers insiders, is a stumbling block. In still other situations, uniting local leaders from different ethnic, cultural, and language groups is the challenge. Public education can provide an arena of shared concerns, but even here, problems, goals, and solutions often are defined differently, even among neighbors. **A challenge for all study participants, whether working within or across social groupings, is to develop mechanisms that can help individuals connect.** For constituency builders working across racial, class-based, ethnic, and other social groups, another challenge is to help constituents bridge social divides. In both instances, activists help constituents find common ground where joint action is possible.

Challenge: Linking Personal Experience to Systemic Perspectives

Many study participants emphasize the value of broadening constituents' perspectives on schools, shifting

> *"There's a lot of strength to be drawn from the sense of collectivity. It allows you to go from a sense that you're a failure and something's wrong with your child to it being a problem with the school."*
>
> *— The head of a national organization*

21

from personal to systemic frameworks. Such a shift means defining problems as the system's failures rather than one's own failures. This work involves identifying, analyzing, and building on the experiences and perspectives of many individuals. It also entails fostering the ability to see local (classroom- or school-based) issues within larger frameworks (clusterwide or systemwide). It also can mean making global policy issues, such as vouchers, relevant and understandable to individuals locally.

Challenge: Promoting Joint Action in a Society That Values Individualism

To build constituency, individuals must be able to join together for the common good. Reformers work to bring people together; foster a sense of common concerns, goals, and understandings; and provide arenas for joint endeavors. Such efforts may focus on members of a particular racial or ethnic group in a community, parents and teachers in a school, or parents from poorly served neighborhoods. For example, an organization may support a handful of concerned teachers who collaborate to articulate and address their perception of the curriculum's failure to meet the needs of their school's many Latino students. Another organization may engage residents from across a city in a process to define the kind of school system they want. A basic challenge in this work lies in developing a perceived link between individual priorities and the common weal, a connection that often must be built from scratch in a society that emphasizes individualism, competition, and personal gain.

Challenge: Developing Mechanisms That Foster Learning and Action

Constituency builders try to create mechanisms that can help parents, community members, teachers, students, and others develop systemic perspectives and work toward common goods. Such mechanisms — including meetings, trainings, study and discussion sessions, information dissemination, mentoring, and action research — can foster recognition of shared concerns, definition of central issues, and development and implementation of joint action. **Successful mechanisms open the possibility of sustained constituent engagement, even as particular individuals and organizations come and go.**

Challenge: Maintaining Focus within Changing Social Contexts

Constituency builders work to stay focused on reform goals while dealing with the complexities of changing social, economic, and political contexts. In part because schools are at the center of American society and, as discussed earlier, shoulder many expectations, study participants find their work affected by many factors. These include rapidly changing demographics, such as increasingly diverse student bodies, the growth of single-parent families, and an aging population. Such shifts require schools to respond with appropriate capacities and resources. But reformers also must know how to build constituencies among changing populations. Other significant trends include increasing demands that public schools teach all students to high standards; a widespread reliance on high-stakes testing to validate student achievement; and a turn by many to privatized solutions to underachieving schools, including rising interest in vouchers, for-profit education companies, private education, and home schooling, which could narrow the share of the population with a direct, vested interest in public education. Amidst these and other factors, including changing economic and political climate, reformers must balance the need to act strategically, responding to opportunities and challenges, while also keeping clear goals in mind.

Signs of Impact

The ultimate goals of the constituency builders who participated in this study are far-reaching: equitable, quality public education for all children; deep, sustained, and ongoing reform of public education; and democracy in practice. As study participants work toward these goals, they and the constituencies they support achieve changes that immediately benefit students and communities. Following is a small sampling of these achievements, each a milestone in a long journey, not a final destination. In some cases, constituency building was the sole or main strategy employed; in others, it was a vital component in an effort including other methods, such as professional advocacy or litigation. Each is described in more detail within this chapter. (Note: The Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative did not fund lobbying or litigation.)

Statewide, comprehensive, standards-based reform that resulted in improved academic performance at every grade level and increased high school graduation rates (Kentucky)

Collaboration among the community, the private sector, and the school system to build a new elementary school building designed to support a dual-language acquisition program (Washington, D.C.)

Improved teacher recruitment and development of a teacher retention program for low-income neighborhood schools (Chicago, Illinois)

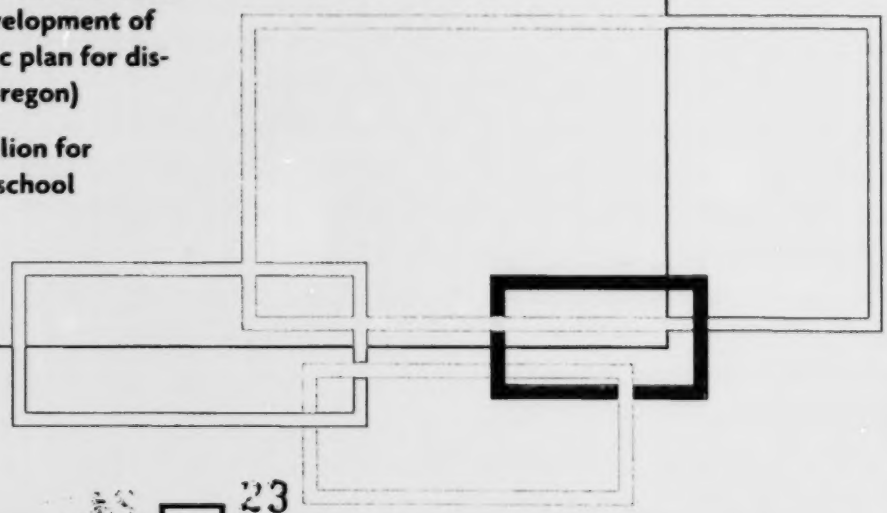
A $5 million rehabilitation of a high school (Chicago, Illinois)

Block scheduling and curricular changes resulting in improvements in student grades, credit accrual, and English language literacy (Salinas, California)

Establishment of structures and training for school-based management teams (Jackson, Mississippi)

Passage of a $75 million public schools bond measure, accompanied by development of a five-year vision and strategic plan for districtwide reform (Portland, Oregon)

Annual allocations of $2.5 million for educationally oriented after-school programs designed by teams of educators and parents (Houston, Texas)



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CHAPTER THREE

Role and Impact of Constituency Building for School Reform

Whether they trained as teachers or lawyers, whether they worked previously as journalists or foundation directors, all study participants see constituency building as essential to achieving quality, equitable public education systems. **This chapter explores that conviction: *Why is constituency building vital for achieving public school reform?*** Following this chapter, Part II of the report examines in detail how constituency builders work toward such a powerful result.

As participants describe their work, it becomes clear that constituency building contributes to at least three main objectives. Although the terminology varies among groups, activists generally aim to achieve these interrelated objectives:

- Build understanding and a sense of shared interest in quality, equitable schools.
- Create political will and hold public education institutions accountable.
- Change roles, relationships, and power dynamics.

All three objectives are political in nature. They concern who has power and how they use it to shape education. Participants have helped constituents examine the political context of public education, assess who makes decisions and who has influence currently, and identify and use their own power, whether that is the power to vote, to influence others through speech and demonstrations, or to change their own practices.

In the day-to-day work of constituency building, the three objectives are inextricably interwoven; any one task, such as a training or demonstration, might contribute to meeting all three objectives. This chapter, however, unravels the three to examine how each contributes to the overarching goals of reform. Nonetheless, participants note that each constituency-building effort discussed had to build understanding, create political will, and change power dynamics — important gains in themselves — to achieve particular reform goals.

Throughout the chapter, examples illustrate how the objectives serve as critical steps toward creating quality, equitable schools. The examples also demonstrate how constituency building for reform can be effective in many settings, from rural states to large cities, and in places where support from officials ranges from zero to substantial. Sample efforts show a range of impacts, extending from classroom practice to district and state policy, and addressing major reform issues, such as standards, accountability, governance, funding, facilities, and curricula. **Each example is extracted from a work in progress, an ongoing effort to reform a system. In each case, constituency building was a vital element in the complex dynamics that produced change.**

These efforts make up only a small part of current work to build reform constituencies and illustrate just a few of the changes that such efforts help achieve in many communities around the country. Some of the groups involved received support directly from the Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform (CBPSR) Initiative. Others are members of regional or national networks or coalitions that received CBPSR Initiative funding. For example, the CBPSR Initiative supported the Interfaith Education Fund, which in turn provided assistance to local groups, including Austin Interfaith and the Metropolitan Organization of Houston.

Building Understanding and a Sense of Shared Interest in Quality, Equitable Schools

Study participants seek to expand stakeholders' understanding of the education system, their experiences in that system, and their ability to effect change. Constituents' broadened perspectives enable them to identify common interests and work together to improve education.

All participants provide information, training, and forums to help people view their experiences in light of

school systems' policies and patterns of practice. For instance, participants describe parents who initially think that their children's academic difficulties are their fault or are due to a particular teacher or principal. Sharing their stories with others, parents learn to identify patterns and systemic factors that shape their children's education. Organizers in Austin, Texas, helped parents and teachers understand the relationships between district policies and what children experience in the classroom, as well as the ways decisions are made in the system.

Austin, Texas — *In fall 1999, a team of a dozen parents and teachers at T.A. Brown Elementary School, a member of the Alliance Schools Project, began asking questions about bilingual education. Why were bilingual education classes so often taught by substitutes? Why did the school library lack Spanish-language books? What was the district's philosophy for bilingual education? With support from Austin Interfaith, an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate, the team joined with parents and teachers from other district schools who shared their concerns. They held a series of "public actions" involving hundreds of people. At each of these meetings, parents presented their views and questions and asked the district's deputy superintendent for bilingual education to commit to working with them.*

Within one year, the effort achieved results: a published statement of philosophy, outlining clear goals for the district's bilingual and English as a second language programs; a new book purchasing policy, expanding the pool of vendors to include those with a greater selection of Spanish-language books; a requirement that each bilingual education student be provided with two copies of each textbook, one in English and one in Spanish; an intensive English and native-language literacy program for middle school students; and a higher priority on recruiting bilingual teachers.

As constituents understand the system better, constituency builders try to raise their expectations and boost their confidence in their ability to effect change. One local constituency builder notes, "Our parents had been conditioned to accept the status quo, that ... because I live in this side of town, this is the best that I can get." Study participants aim to raise expectations by providing comparative school data, educating constituents about their legal rights, teaching about strategies used elsewhere to improve schools, and providing information about and visits to innovative schools. In Houston, Texas, organizers helped parents and teachers not only envision new programs, but also see themselves as people who could hold public institutions accountable.

Houston, Texas — *When organizers from The Metropolitan Organization (TMO), an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate, met with parents in 1996, many voiced concerns about what their children were doing after school. Eighty of those parents, from diverse neighborhoods, backgrounds, and races, collaborated with principals and teachers to research after-school programs in other cities and discuss possible programs for their Houston schools. As they discovered how children learn in after-school programs, parents also developed more sophisticated expectations of their schools. In a year, parents held nine meetings, with 165 to 1,000 people attending each, to ask city council members and other elected officials to approve and fund c new plan for after-school programs. They won a pilot program for 11 schools. In each school, parents and educators designed activities tailored to meet their children's specific needs.*

By 2001, the Houston city council allocation for these after-school programs had reached $2.5 million, with more than 100 institutions, most of them schools, receiving funds. TMO parents continued to work with schools to help design and implement quality after-school enrichment programs.

In building understanding of the public education system, study participants say they struggle to do two things simultaneously:

1) defend public schools as institutions that are vital to democracy, can serve all children well, and can improve; and

2) call attention to the need to address severe educational inequities and inadequacies.

Without efforts in the former category, voters will be less willing to invest in public schools; parents will be more likely to turn to private schools, or in cities, move to suburbs with better-funded schools; and policymakers will be more inclined to consider privatization. Without the latter, many mainly poor children will continue to attend under-resourced and poorly performing schools. Permanent, independent constituency-building organizations play a key role in raising awareness about these issues. As outsiders, they have the credibility to point out what is right in schools and the freedom to point out what is wrong. The independence and early achievements of the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools Foundation, a member of the Public Education Network, have enabled it to convene a wide spectrum of stakeholders to confront longstanding inequities.

Portland, Oregon — *Eighty-five percent of Portland's children attend public schools, far more than in than most cities. In the early 1990s, budget cuts resulting from a state property tax cap threatened the quality of the city's schools, even as the state legislature called for world-class public education. When a second round of budget cuts reached $25 million in 1996, school and community leaders formed the Portland Public Schools Foundation, an independent, citywide organization. The foundation's first initiative was to organize a 30,000-person "March for our Schools," the largest demonstration in Oregon's history.*

That year, the foundation raised $10 million in eight weeks, breaking all nonprofit fundraising records in Portland and enabling the district to bring back 200 of the 425 laid-off teachers and librarians.

As parents, businesspeople, and civic leaders became involved in the funding issue, they also grew aware of the need for school improvement. As Foundation Director Cynthia Guyer states, "Once you feel like you have been part of leveraging millions of dollars for your school system, it makes you think about your investment, and the school reform/improvement agenda becomes the next set of questions you are engaged in." Recognizing that continued support for the city's public schools depended on addressing longstanding problems, including a stark achievement gap between white and African American and Latino students, the foundation partnered with the board of education and the superintendent to initiate a year long, community-based strategic planning process. Three hundred and fifty school and community leaders struggled with questions of school accountability and equity, and 2,000 others participated in focus groups, surveys, and community forums. The school board adopted the resulting plan in June 2000, and a task force of parent, community, school, and city government leaders is working on ways to close the achievement gap, including the use of data for continuous improvement and a school accountability system.

Besides broadening awareness of the school system's assets and challenges, the inclusive process built community commitment to the system and a shared vision of systemwide improvement. In 1999, the foundation led a successful campaign for a historic $75 million bond measure for the city's schools. With 50 percent voter turnout required to pass any tax measure in Oregon and a history of low turnout for primaries, passage demanded large-scale mobilization of parents, educators, and community members. Fifty-one percent of the electorate voted, and the bond measure passed with 63 percent of the vote.

Constituency builders emphasize the need to move beyond agreement about problems to formulation of clear goals and plans for change. One study member notes, "There is an assumption that if we share a concern, we share the vision for the solution, too." Yet participants' experiences prove this assumption to be false. For this reason, constituency builders facilitate joint goal setting and planning through a range of mechanisms, from small group discussions to massive forums.

Many participants build coalitions as a way to develop shared frameworks and consensus on goals and strategies for reform. In doing so, they face the challenges of bringing diverse groups together and maintaining focus and agreement over the long haul. In *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education*, Jeffrey Henig and colleagues argue that school reform coalitions are even more challenging than joint action in many other arenas:

> Building sustainable coalitions for systemic school reform is much harder than building partnerships for downtown development partly because the payoffs are less immediate, tangible, divisible, and assured. It is harder, too, because the alternatives to working collectively to solve the problem are well-established and well-known: personal exit to suburbs, private schools, or school-specific solutions; corporate exit to suburbs, in-house training, or personnel recruitment from other areas; political leaders' option to focus on other issues.[1]

In Kentucky, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, as an independent citizens group, was able to overcome these obstacles to guide and build support for fundamental systemic reform.

> **Kentucky**[2] — *Prior to reform, Kentucky's education system was recognized widely as one of the worst in the country. Massive constituency building, led by the Prichard Committee, contributed both to the Kentucky Supreme Court's willingness to order groundbreaking changes and to the legislature's passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The committee's 1984 statewide town forum — one of many activities — illustrates the enormous scale of the group's work: 20,000 Kentuckians participated in the televised forum, 6,000 individual comments were recorded, and 15,000 written statements were submitted. The committee helped build a state-level coalition to develop consensus among educators' associations, the Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and other groups, each of which worked with its members to further reform. In addition, the committee reached out to community-based organizations to stimulate public concern and facilitate local discussions among parents, teachers, businesspeople, and other stakeholders.*
>
> *Enacted in 1990, KERA reduced the resource gap among school districts and established school-based decision-making and comprehensive standards-based reform, including a school accountability system with student performance standards and assessment. KERA also increased professional development for teachers, introduced new preschool and elementary school programs, and created school-based family resource and youth services centers.*
>
> *Multiple measures show dramatic impact in the first decade of KERA implementation. By 1999, Kentucky ranked 30th among states, up from 42nd, in high school graduation rates. Kentucky has risen from 42nd place to 30th in per-pupil spending, from 41st to 30th in pupil-teacher ratios, and from 38th to 30th in teacher salaries. Three in four at-risk 4-year-olds now attend preschool programs. Kentucky assessment results reveal improvements at every grade level. The 1998 National Assessment for Educational Progress shows Kentucky's reading and math scores increasing significantly compared to other states, with Kentucky passing the average score in reading and nearing it in math and science.*
>
> *Ten years after the passage of KERA, as reform efforts continue to challenge power structures and daily practice, the Prichard Committee helps hold the statewide reform coalition together. To deepen local implementation, committee workshops teach 200 parents a year how to lead parent-educator dialogues on reform, use data to improve schools, and make school-based decision-making effective.*

Study participants strive to expand individuals' perceptions and abilities as well as develop a shared sense of commonality and capacity to work together. Some groups, such as the Public Education Network and the Prichard Committee, try to build collective capacity among all stakeholders, enabling individuals and organizations to work collectively across differences in areas such as role, race, language, and income level. One national organization director sees the purpose of constituency building as "bridging these groups, who are inclined to be very insulated themselves." Clarence Stone and other researchers with the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, which has examined school reform in 11 cities, argue that reform cannot succeed unless constituents shift to a shared framework beyond "the limited concerns of particular groups — business leaders with economy and efficiency, parents with the opportunities available to their own children, educators with salary and professional prerogatives."[3]

Other groups, such as California Tomorrow and the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, whose

work is described below, try to build collective capacity and a sense of unity within particular communities whose children have been excluded from quality education. A statewide group's director contrasts this approach to broader civic capacity building:

> In a system in which African American and Latino children, poor children, and immigrants are systemically tracked to inferior educations, some of the organizations are specifically about raising the voices of those communities to address the racism in the system. There may be alliance and coalition building in that work — between various excluded communities, between those in the schools and those in the community who care about this agenda — but the heart of it is to change the exclusionary nature of public education.

Efforts to develop a shared understanding and framework for reform are challenging partly because of the complex relationships among schools, communities, and larger social and economic trends. Reform discussions tend to raise fundamental questions, not only about public education, but also about societal issues. Study participants note that equity-oriented reforms, in particular, challenge society to grapple with the ways people see their communities and country as well as their schools. For example, a participant who works in multiple sites points out that addressing immigrant student education invokes larger questions: "There's no conversation about the language of instruction without it being about how we are responding politically to immigration."

Creating Political Will and Holding Public Education Institutions Accountable

Numerous studies document obstacles to education reform, including various pressures to retain the status quo: the bureaucratic tendency toward inertia, professional interests in protecting jobs and job conditions, and pressure from parents concerned that change might mean that valuable resources are taken away from their children. Paul Hill, Christine Campbell, and James Harvey assert in *It Takes a City* that "leadership must come, strongly and for a long time, from outside the system."[4] In *Building Civic Capacity,* Clarence Stone and colleagues conclude that, although many reform efforts have been initiated, they have not been broad enough or sustained enough to have lasting impact. "Yet there are variations among the cities we studied," they note, "and more extensive efforts are associated with a higher level of civic mobilization."[5]

Study participants' experiences show how outside organizations and constituents can exert and sustain pressure for reform independently. **Although most activists develop working relationships with at least some supportive district or state staff, their independent status enables them to challenge policy positions, present new ideas, and exert pressure on the system in ways their counterparts within the system cannot.** As the evaluation of the Donors' Education Collaborative Initiative in New York City shows and the current study affirms, independent groups use "overlapping and mutually supportive strategies to develop political will." These methods include:

- building visible constituencies to motivate and legitimize a reform effort,
- generating media attention, and
- developing constituent access to and credibility with policymakers and senior administrators.[6]

Study participants' achievements show that constituency building can help change schools; moreover, all participants argue that it is necessary to improve education of under-served children, particularly children of color and poor children. Poor children are concentrated in districts and schools that lack adequate resources, including funding, qualified teachers, strong educational leaders, facilities, and technology. Improving education for those children depends, in part, on reallocation of resources, either within the education system or from other sources. Because allocation of public resources is determined largely by elected officials, within constitutional boundaries, study participants and other constituency builders seek to create political pressure for equitable allocation.

Their various orientations — whether, as discussed above, they seek to build capacity across groups or

mainly within excluded communities — are reflected in their strategies for building political pressure. Some study participants believe that systemic change requires creating, among the general public, a sense of shared responsibility for the education of all children. A director of a national organization says:

> If we are to give poor and minority children in America the opportunity they both need and deserve, we must join the isolated interests and concerns of Americans into a common and shared cause to build a movement — not unlike the civil rights movement of the 1960s. ... The point is that when the rest of the nation began to consider Birmingham's problem and Selma's problem as *its* problem, the civil rights movement was infused with the energy and resources of the entire nation.[7]

Other study participants take a different lesson from the civil rights movement: "We walked into this work with a background in civil rights and with everything that that implies about having had to rely on the courts to insist that people change. ... There is not a shared public will to really address issues of racism and equity." These constituency builders try to create political will solely or mainly by building capacity within African American, Latino, low-income, immigrant, and other poorly served communities to advocate for their children. One participant asserts that, particularly regarding equity issues, efforts to obtain universal support can be counterproductive: "[W]hen people emphasize the generic 'all students' kind of language in an attempt to bring more and more people in and get agreements ... it ends up masking the level of specificity and understanding about issues of equity that are necessary to really deal with them."

In addition to building capacity among excluded groups to press for change, some organizations also use other advocacy strategies, including litigation, to bring about policy change where political support or momentum is lacking. (While constituency building is supported by the Ford Foundation's initiative, litigation is not.) In Florida, for instance, families sued the state to establish clear rights for English language learners. The *LULAC et al. v. State Board of Education* suit and resulting consent decree not only forced the establishment of equitable state policy, but also created a sense of entitlement among English language learners' families. Constituency-building efforts then built on those gains.

Florida — *Since 1990, hundreds of Latino, Asian, and other immigrant parents have been working to hold schools and districts accountable for recognizing the legal rights of limited English proficient (LEP) students, as established previously in the* LULAC et al. v. State Board of Education *consent decree. The consent decree requires public schools to provide LEP students with comprehensible instruction, full access to school programs, translations of key school documents into the language of the home, and interpretation at parent meetings.*

Central to this effort are clusters of language-minority parents and community-organization staff members from around the state who meet regularly to exchange information and develop leadership, policy analysis, and other skills needed to monitor school and district compliance with the consent decree. With support from the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) and the Multicultural Education and Training Association, each member of these leadership groups heads a local parent network, often linking immigrants from many countries. When these local networks gather for joint sessions, meetings are held in the first languages of participating parents, including Spanish, Haitian Kreyol, and various Asian languages. NCAS also supports development of advocacy skills by providing network members with translated information and communicating with them by e-mail and telephone.

Each local group provides a point of access for immigrants to school policymaking and challenges the system to respond to constituents' needs, thus performing functions necessary for citizen participation in school policy.[8]

As a result of these efforts, counties with skilled bilingual parent advocates generally have stronger district and school LEP Parent Leadership Councils and better implementation of the consent decree's provisions than ever before. These parents and family members, empowered with new leadership skills

and access to information, represent important resources for other LEP parents, often accompanying them to school meetings to resolve problems that threaten their child's school success.

For reform to succeed, constituents must exert political will at many levels, from national and state levels to individual schools and classrooms. Study participants help constituents act at all levels. Moreover, sustaining reform demands not just initial will, but demanding accountability through years, even decades, of implementation. Study participants emphasize their roles in maintaining public vigilance, sustaining reform alliances, and bringing new political leaders on board. Scholars affirm that role. Discussing the roles of community groups in ensuring continuity in reform processes in Texas, Illinois, and Kentucky, Marilyn Gittell states: "The longevity of these groups serves as a critical link between officials, prevents policy from veering off course, and establishes a long-term, reliable source of information for the public."[9] Analyzing political challenges and conditions necessary for systemic reform, Susan Fuhrman points to the effectiveness of independent groups such as the Prichard Committee in maintaining coherence over time:

> They address the problems of fragmentation, overemphasis on election, policy overload and specialization by uniting representatives across fragmented policy arenas and outliving changes in political leadership. Such structures promote consensus on a reform agenda that mitigates against political tendencies to veer off in new directions.[10]

In Washington, D.C., the 21st Century School Fund has combined efforts at school and district levels to generate and sustain the will for capital improvements and the institutional capacity to carry them out, even during the 1990s, a time of political upheaval in the city.

Washington, D.C. — *Until 1998, some of Oyster Elementary School's classes were held in hallways and stairwells and portable classrooms that had exceeded their life expectancy. The overcrowded building, built in 1926, had inadequate bathrooms and a roof that leaked with every rain. Moreover, the school's facilities did not support the curriculum. The dual-language acquisition program, in which all students learn all subjects in Spanish and English, requires two teachers per classroom and sufficient space for concurrent instruction. Oyster lacked that space. Oyster parents joined forces and developed a plan to recapture the significant land value of the school site to generate funds. The 21st Century School Fund, formed by a handful of concerned parents, led the charge in creating a public-private partnership to modernize the school and advocate for capital improvements throughout the district.*

Fueled by broad participation among Oyster's economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse families, the Oyster School-Community Council and Local School Restructuring Team worked for over nine years to achieve their goals. Parents educated officials and navigated the system's bureaucracy. Committees of parents and educators drew up educational specifications that described the space requirements for a new school. They kept pressure on the district through three mayors, four superintendents, four different governance structures, four directors of facilities and seven project managers, two Board of Education votes, three City Council votes, two Request for Proposal processes, and uncounted administrative steps.

The results of these efforts have been notable. Oyster students moved to a temporary school location in fall 1998, when construction began, and they entered the new Oyster School in September 2001.

The success of the Oyster community, the 21st Century School Fund, and the public-private partnership demonstrates to similarly under-served communities that they can obtain better schools. The dilapidated state of Oyster's original facilities is not unusual for the District of Columbia. Community groups across the city have joined the 21st Century School Fund in holding the school district accountable for developing and implementing a Master Facilities Plan that supports quality education. They also have generated sufficient political will for an increase of hundreds of millions of dollars in the capital budget.

Changing Roles, Relationships, and Power Dynamics

In addition to the many activities described earlier, constituency builders work to expand how individuals see their roles in schools and help them take on new roles and form new relationships. Constituency builders also try to broaden participation in governance structures and support constituents' use of democratic and constitutional tools to exert pressure for change. For example, Eva Gold and Diane Brown found, in evaluating Philadelphia's Alliance Organizing Project (AOP): "AOP organizing provides parents with an expanded view of their roles in schools and helps them to redefine their responsibilities to their children's education."[11] Study participants describe helping other constituents reshape their roles, as well. For instance, Portland Public Schools Foundation brought community groups, businesses, local politicians, and higher education representatives into the strategic planning process, along with parents and educators. In Washington, D.C., the 21st Century School Fund created a new model of public-private collaboration for improving school facilities and, in the process, spurred a private firm to develop a new group within the firm to work on schools development.

Study participants describe part of their task as helping constituents see themselves as legitimate advocates not just for their children's education, but for a better education system. NCAS provides parent leaders with business cards and stipends to foster a sense of legitimacy and membership in a common effort. The perceived status is particularly important among immigrant parents, some of whom come from cultures with relatively rigid social distinctions.

Although study participants vary in the strategies they use to help constituents take on new roles, all agree that contact with other leaders and ongoing mentoring are essential. Constituency-building groups often support peer networks, such as the Intercultural Development Research Association's (IDRA) parent leadership network in San Antonio and the Alliance Schools Project's principals network in Austin. Study participants point out that ongoing support is particularly important for immigrants from countries where speaking out for change may not only be unacceptable culturally, but also dangerous.

Many study members structure opportunities for constituents to take on new roles first in low-key situations with extensive support. In Kentucky, parents participating in the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership formulate school improvement projects that they implement after they conclude training. In designing projects, parents use the same assessment and plan-

Power Dynamics

Participants seek to change power dynamics in many ways, including:

- **Changing who has authority to make decisions, for example by establishing local school councils that include parents and teachers and that have the authority to hire the principal and allocate funds.**
- **Supporting constituents in exercising new decision-making authority, for example by providing training to parents on local school councils so they can effectively assert their positions.**
- **Increasing and diversifying input for decisions, for example by holding public meetings where community members share their views with officials and the media.**
- **Increasing public awareness of decisions and who makes them.**
- **Helping teachers exercise their ability to change their own practice and to be an example to others.**
- **Providing forums for students to describe their experiences and expectations.**

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ning process that the state requires schools to use to complete consolidated plans. Thus, the projects build parents' capacity to participate in educational planning while placing them in active roles. Some parents have noted that their increased knowledge of consolidated planning caused school staff to see them in a new light, as valuable resources.

Study participants emphasize the need for safe places where people can reassess their roles and, as one put it, "begin to know each other and themselves differently, away from a setting which can be filled with tension." The need for this type of interaction extends to educators as well as parents and community members, particularly in low-performing schools where conversation is most often absent. Outside organizations can provide safe places and act as conveners and facilitators. In Salinas, California, a group called California Tomorrow (CT) provided a forum where committed individuals (termed "sparks" by CT) could collaborate to address the lack of quality education for immigrant students and English language learners. The independent organization fostered sparks' sense of legitimacy and shared purpose, enabling them to confront potentially divisive equity issues. As a statewide group with national connections, CT linked sparks with innovative schools and educational resources outside Salinas, reframed the educational equity issue within a broader political context, coached sparks in their new roles, and developed a strategy for expanding and institutionalizing reforms.

> **Salinas, California**[12] — *In 1994, when California Tomorrow began working with Alisal High School, the school had an engaged staff, many special projects, and a strong commitment to bilingual education. Nonetheless, student achievement lagged and discipline problems abounded. CT assembled a planning group of equity-oriented Alisal teachers, administrators, and counselors to identify and address the school's equity and achievement issues. To help focus the group's efforts, CT helped students put together a panel to voice their concerns. Responding to these concerns, the planning group created a block schedule that enabled students to work more intensively on fewer subjects and allowed teachers to work more closely with fewer students each day. The weekly schedule included a tutorial period (to provide needed academic support); a mixed-grade, mixed-language proficiency enrichment period (to improve intergroup relations); and common planning time (to foster collaboration and peer support among teachers). Even during a year of teacher contract tensions, the proposed schedule won support from 92 percent of the staff. A new discipline policy and program also went into effect.*
>
> *With the new schedule and discipline policy in place, Alisal teachers turned to instruction. CT supported teachers' efforts to use school data, student interviews, and other research to develop a change strategy. Lacking the principal's support, a core group of 10 teachers independently created and piloted an accelerated literacy program for ninth-grade English language learners. The teachers then spread their vision by writing and disseminating newsletters, inviting others to visit their classrooms, holding evening meetings with parents, and conducting teacher and community training.*
>
> *The schoolwide changes resulted in immediate measured improvements in grades, credit accrual, student involvement in clubs, and reduced disciplinary referrals. In addition, an independent evaluation showed that the new literacy approach paid off for students in improved English language skills and increased access to other academic subjects. The teacher team won the superintendent's backing and now has a supportive principal. The accelerated literacy approach developed by the team has become part of a common repertoire of strategies that all teachers use at Alisal.*

Many constituency builders work to build the understanding and trust necessary for stakeholders to accept each other in new roles and collaborate. This work entails overcoming what participants call "the culture of blame" and defensiveness that permeate many schools, making it difficult to discuss problems or suggest solutions.

Many study participants cite the challenge of bringing together "inside" and "outside" constituencies, that

"I went to school for two years to learn what it takes to be a principal. ... Every time a parent comes into your office, every time a teacher comes into your office, you take that notepad out, and you document, and you dot your I's and cross your T's. It is two years of that very bureaucratic role that we are taught. ... It was not until the training I did with [the constituency-building group], that I began asking, 'Were we creating the space for parents to come in and dialogue in an honest way about our school?' "

— A principal working with an organizing group

is, those employed by or already considered legitimate by the school system and those whose work is viewed as external to the district. Participants say that inside-outside relationships must be nurtured to sustain reform, particularly in urban areas where superintendent, principal, and teacher turnover rates are high. One activist who supports work in multiple sites asserts: "If you build a core leadership base that includes a group of staff, a group of parents, and neighboring institutions, and if it's really been a cultural change and not just a charismatic principal, then that [reform] will hold."

As a multi-issue organization, Chicago ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) has used a health care issue as an opportunity to help parents develop new skills and to promote family-educator relationships. Joint work on the issue built trust and communication among families, educators, and ACORN staff. These new relationships have been critical not only for families raising educational issues at school, but also for parents and school staff cooperating to leverage change at the district level.

Chicago, Illinois — *ACORN members, mostly parents, approached Mason and Hughes elementary schools in Chicago's North Lawndale community in 1999 with a proposal to work together to enroll all eligible children in KidCare, a free public health insurance program. With the principals' permission, the parents began by engaging teachers in shaping the campaign strategy. The collaborative effort eventually enrolled 80 percent of students in KidCare — the highest proportion of any school in Chicago — and produced a model for effective outreach.*

At the same time, some of the parents were participating in Community Organizing for School Reformers, a training program developed by ACORN and Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. Parents in the program wondered how they could influence classroom instruction and eventually focused on teacher recruitment and retention. When they told the schools' principals that they wanted to expand the relationship, the principals welcomed their initiative. The parents ran an ad in local papers and Education Week *soliciting applicants for teaching openings. They learned how to judge resumes and role-played candidate interviews. A parent-faculty collaborative formulated questions for candidates, and parents conducted initial interviews. As a result, parents succeeded in hiring two teachers for Mason Elementary School. In the process, the parents learned how attracting and retaining teachers are related to the school's vision, plan, professional development program, and resources.*

ACORN members at other schools also began working on teacher recruitment and retention. Viewing their schools through the eyes of a

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prospective teacher, parents identified conditions that made teaching and learning difficult. For instance, Harper High School could not recruit a science teacher because it had no operating science laboratories. Parents and educators tackled the barriers. More than 400 parents and residents in the West Englewood neighborhood met with Chicago Public Schools' chief operating officer to demand working science labs and other needed improvements. Their efforts won a $5 million rehabilitation program for Harper, including new science labs. Parents and educators also are mulling improvements in professional development and school culture. They realize that an active parent community makes the school attractive to teachers they want to recruit and retain.

The parents also have investigated the discrepancy between teachers' qualifications in low-income, low-performing schools and those in the system's elite schools. Parents took on systemic issues contributing to the discrepancy, including differences among schools' resources and the effects of districtwide accountability measures. Three hundred parents launched a campaign that entailed releasing a study of instructional inequities and going en masse to board of education meetings and district offices to demand recruitment of qualified teachers for low-performing schools. The parents won a commitment from the board of education's chairman to hire more teachers than ever before, and they are collaborating with the district's human resources department to design a teacher retention program that will be piloted at some ACORN neighborhood schools.

ACORN parents' work illustrates not only relationship building but also how constituents can exercise their constitutional rights to free speech and free assembly. In many cases, constituents combine collaboration and accountability strategies to exert pressure and change power dynamics. For instance, ACORN members built collaborative relationships with school staff, but also published a study documenting the district's inequitable distribution of resources and staged large demonstrations to put pressure on policymakers.

Study participants assert it is critical to institutionalize expanded roles and relationships so they outlast particular leaders and situations. Many constituency builders focus on changing governance structures, particularly at the school and district levels. Study participants say these efforts must include ongoing support for parent and community participation. Parents for Public Schools of Jackson, Mississippi, illustrates how constituency-building groups can provide ongoing support as previously uninvolved stakeholders take seats at the table.

Jackson, Mississippi — *Beginning in 1995, the local chapter of Parents for Public Schools (PPS) has advocated site-based management as a vital strategy for raising the achievement of all students. Parents successfully advocated for and worked with a district committee to write a site-based management policy. Enacted by the school board in 1999, the policy requires each school to form a site council made up of parents, teachers, classified staff, the principal, and another community member. Each council is responsible for creating and monitoring implementation of a data-driven School Improvement Plan, reviewing and making recommendations for the school budget, and selecting, in cooperation with the superintendent, the school's principal.*

In 1999, with funding from the Ford Foundation's Collaborating for Education Reform Initiative, Jackson PPS began the Ask for More Collaborative, which seeks to raise student achievement, beginning with Jackson's lowest-performing feeder system (one high school and the two middle and seven elementary schools that send students to it). The Ask for More partners — schools, community organizations, families, and the local college's principals institute — have developed and delivered extensive training for school site councils that emphasizes analyzing school data, including student test scores, to identify achievement gaps and creating plans to improve outcomes for all students. It also addresses how to hold productive meetings, what it means to serve as a representative on a site council, and how to understand school budgets. The district has adopted the Ask for More curriculum as the site governance training for the district.

As a result of the training, site councils in the 10 targeted schools have focused attention on achievement gaps and the need for specific types of professional development. Over 200 teachers and all 10 principals have participated in professional development focused on reading, writing, and mathematics. The collaborative's work has resulted in improved reading and math scores, increased parent participation on school governance councils, and greater teacher participation in professional development.

> *"You can't declare democracy and then disband. To enable people to participate in democracy, some people need specific help to come to the table."*
>
> *— A national director*

The Context for the Work: School Reform and Communities

As the examples in this chapter illustrate, study participants employ a variety of methods, often simultaneously, to achieve the three objectives examined in this chapter:

- Build understanding and a sense of shared interest in quality, equitable schools.
- Create political will and hold public education institutions accountable.
- Change roles, relationships, and power dynamics.

In working toward these objectives, constituency builders enhance the capacity of individuals, organizations, and communities to address longstanding inequities and inadequacies in education. Of course, more than enhanced constituent capacity and activism are needed to ensure quality, equitable public education, but participants' experiences demonstrate that constituency building is powerful partly because it can generate other necessary elements of reform. For instance, adequate funding is essential to quality, equitable schools, yet it often is lacking, particularly in low-income and minority communities. Strong constituencies can generate the political will for adequate funding, as they have in Portland, Kentucky, New York, and elsewhere. Study participants have helped constituents press for and implement critical reforms, such as improved facilities in the District of Columbia, appropriate textbooks in Austin, qualified teachers in Chicago, and teacher-led professional development and collaboration in Salinas, to name just a few.

Although study participants' work focuses on constituency building for *public school reform*, it takes place in the context of communities and society, which often increases the challenge. For example, as noted in Chapter 2, the highly fragmented nature of American society and the value it places on individualism heighten the challenge of building a sense of shared interests and capacity to work together in new ways. Moreover, families' expectations of schools and their roles in schools are shaped by not only their educational experiences, but also their experiences with other public institutions, their overall sense of how well their community's needs are being met, and the efficacy of previous efforts to improve services or guarantee their rights. Particularly in low-income and minority communities, this context adds to the challenge of raising constituents' expectations of schools and their roles in the education system.

Part II of the report explores *how* study participants build strong constituencies for reform in the face of these and other challenges. Each chapter examines a particular aspect of the work, from building capacity for collective action to changing power dynamics. Taken together, the activities analyzed in Part II constitute the ways constituency builders reach their three objectives and, thus, help bring about quality, equitable public schools for all children.

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[1] Henig, Jeffrey, et al., *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 279.

[2] Impact data are drawn from *Gaining Ground: Hard Work and High Expectations for Kentucky Schools,* Lexington, KY: Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, 1999. Among the numerous studies documenting the key role of the Prichard Committee in Kentucky reform are two pieces published by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education: Adams, Jacob E., Jr., *The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence: Credible Advocacy for Kentucky Schools,* 1993, and Fuhrman, Susan, *Politics and Systemic Education Reform,* 1994.

[3] Stone, Clarence, "Civic Capacity and Urban School Reform," in *Changing Urban Education,* ed. Clarence Stone, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998, p. 258. See also Henig, *The Color of School Reform.*

[4] Hill, Paul T., Christine Campbell, and James Harvey, *It Takes a City: Getting Serious about Urban School Reform,* Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2000, p.107.

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[6] Hirota, Janice, Robin Jacobowitz, and Prudence Brown, *The Donors' Education Collaborative: Strategies for Systemic School Reform,* Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2000, p. 20.

[7] Puriefoy, Wendy D., in *Connections* 8:1 (winter 2001), Washington, DC: Public Education Network, p. 5.

[8] For identification of the key functions of citizen organizations, see Gittell, Marilyn J., *Limits to Citizen Participation: The Decline of Community Organizations,* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980.

[9] Gittell, Marilyn J., "Engaging the Community," in *Strategies for School Equity: Creating Productive Schools in a Just Society,* ed. Marilyn J. Gittell, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 179.

[10] Fuhrman, p. 4.

[11] Gold, Eva, and Diane Brown, *A Report to the Alliance Organizing Project on its Work with Parents,* Philadelphia: Research for Action, 1998, p. 15.

[12] The description draws heavily from Olsen, Laurie, et al., *Igniting Change for Immigrant Students: Portraits of Three High Schools,* Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow, 1999.

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Part II

The Work

CHAPTER FOUR

Defining the Territory

Certain basic organizational decisions underpin and inform reform campaigns. Sometimes these decisions are inherent in the mission and philosophy of the organization and, as such, infuse all its efforts. For example, Parents for Public Schools' constituency building among parents is such a decision. In other instances, particular circumstances may determine strategic decisions. In Texas, the historic link between the Intercultural Development Research Association and Edgewood Independent School District in San Antonio partly prompted the association to target the area for parent leadership development. **This chapter looks briefly at the common decisions that shape organizational starting points and set the stage for core tasks of constituency building, which are discussed in the following chapters.**

A note of clarification: Analysis in this and the following chapters proceeds *as if* constituency building and reform efforts occur in a linear, developmental fashion. However, given the complex and shifting political, historical, and social contexts of this work, social change practitioners assert that it is virtually never "linear." Nonetheless, to "unpack" or understand the components of constituency builders' work, it is helpful to examine overlapping and intersecting components as if they are sequential. In practice, study participants underscore the critical value of flexibility, the ability to assess and reassess situations as they change, and the willingness to rethink strategies while adhering to organizational tenets.

Decision: Single-Issue Versus Multiple-Issue Focus

For some reform groups, such as the Public Education Network and the 21st Century School Fund, education issues reside at the heart of their missions. Other organizations, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation and ACORN, deal with a range of community issues, including schools but also housing; public services such as water, sewage, and transportation; and public health. The difference between these two approaches is more a matter of emphasis than mutual exclusion: Is the main focus on education reform issues? Or is school reform one means to drive community organizing and capacity building?

Decision: Primary Constituents

The range of education stakeholders is vast; some activists argue that everyone should be involved because of education's importance to the quality of life, the common good, and the future of the country and even, given globalization, the world. Some organizations focus on a particular slice of the population, such as parents, while others look to all community members, both individuals and organizations inside as well as outside the school system. Still other groups draw stakeholders from across the country and from across sectors involved in their school systems — including parents, educators, and union officials. For other efforts, businesses, business leaders, and state and local legislators are primary constituents, along with parents and other community members. Some campaigns focus on building working groups of teachers or networks of principals. Increasingly, efforts seek to recruit and engage students in reform. Whatever their focus, the ways constituency builders define their primary constituencies inform their strategies and goals. Chapter 6 looks at ways of creating and developing the potential of diversity among constituents. Chapter 7 explores the dynamics of campaigns that bring together constituents from inside and outside of the school system.

Decision: Explicit Versus Implicit Focus on Equity

Some constituency builders focus on organizing and supporting specific sectors, such as immigrant, racial or ethnic minority, or low-income families whose children frequently are ill-served by public schools. In contrast, other organizations aim to build capacity and foster engagement among the general public. Those working

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with the public as a whole often see their efforts as a way to help build broad-based civic capacity in a democratic society. In general, these inclusive approaches identify common interests among stakeholders, foster relationships among diverse groups, and initiate means to develop collective solutions. These approaches are supported by the research of Clarence Stone and colleagues, who argue that the main obstacles to systemic and sustained school reform "are political in nature; [the obstacles] are rooted in the fact that various groups have distinct interests that often lead them to work against one another in ways that dissipate energies and blunt reform efforts."[1] All these groups and activists, however, are mindful of the history of education in the United States, and believe it is imperative to pressure the system to remedy long-standing inequities.

Decision: Points of Entry into Reform Work

There are various routes to systemic impact. Organizational priorities and aims are important factors in deciding on entry points into reform work. Some organizations work with multiple constituencies on a statewide or citywide basis for comprehensive school reform; others begin more locally, focusing, for example, on parents with children in a single school or stakeholders in a particular neighborhood. Reform groups also employ a variety of strategies to initiate the constituency-building process. Some start by building one-on-one relationships with and among constituents or helping parents map their school system and community; others begin by building a coalition of stakeholders deemed "critical" by virtue of their role and status or start with individuals who act as "sparks" to make change happen.

Organizations also select entry points at various levels of the education system, though they often aim for change throughout the system. Some focus on issues at the local school as the point of entry; others begin with legislative backing at the state level. In addition, national organizations often provide support at local levels across the country, but also work at the national level, convening conferences, issuing statements of purpose, leveraging funding, and educating legislators and other policymakers.

Decision: Level, Intensity, and Aim of Stakeholder Involvement

Study participants recognize that stakeholders have various preferences and priorities for their participation. Some are willing to engage in building the reform organization as well as the reform work, while others participate only in public activities directly related to reform. Both are important. One team member points out that "getting the troops out" in large numbers for public events can leverage power, but a few stalwarts might manage the day-to-day work.

Similarly, organizations set various expectations for constituency building. At one end of the spectrum, public engagement efforts that support litigation for school reform, for example, might seek organizational and individual support in the form of workshop attendance and sponsorship, observation of court proceedings, or efforts to define the sought-after reform. At the other end of the spectrum, constituency building may be a proxy term for community organizing — a long-term, embedded undertaking to build individual, organizational, and community capacity and power to influence the issues and institutions, including education, that affect community life. In any case, the desired level of stakeholder involvement must inform a campaign's approach and strategies.

Decision: Differing Emphases on Community Development and School Change

All study participants underscore the connection between school reform and development of schools' communities. The emphasis on this link highlights both the importance of involving communities in their schools and the role schools play in their communities. For example, Michele Cahill says in a publication of Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, "Schools that are connected to community are focused on broader community development issues. ... With this shift in thinking comes a new definition of the school as a critical institution in the life of the community."[2] The link between communities and schools has gained increasing attention and legitimacy, in part through the work of constituency builders.

Reform groups take various approaches to strengthening and supporting this link. Differences among approaches often relate to the varying expectations that organizations hold for constituency building, as discussed above. At one end of the continuum are reform efforts that build individuals' and organizations' capacity to wield influence in relevant institutions and decisions that affect the well-being of neighborhoods and those that live and work there. Although school reform is critical to this agenda, activists also pay great attention to the processes of building constituency engagement, community networks, stakeholder capacity, and local leadership. Efforts at the other end of the continuum focus more intently on the ends of reform efforts — reforming schools by backing or defeating legislation, for example, or redefining the terms of public debates. These efforts also recognize that engaged, skilled, and knowledgeable constituencies are critical to achieving success. The differences among these approaches, however, signal the need for different strategies, different allocation of resources, and different staff skills.

Against the background of basic decisions that underpin constituency-building efforts, the following chapters illuminate the common core tasks that reformers undertake as they strive to translate shared values, motivating principles, aims, and analyses into tangible change and achievements.

[1] Stone, Clarence N., et al., *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001, p. 140.

[2] Cahill, Michele, *Schools and Community Partnerships: Reforming Schools, Revitalizing Communities*, a Schools and Community Working Paper, Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 1996, p. iii.

CHAPTER FIVE

Fostering Collective Action

Constituency builders assert that individuals who join together to further shared interests, instead of struggling alone, are more effective in creating public will for reform and holding public institutions accountable. **It is as groups and networks of groups that constituents can convincingly claim their place in shaping policy debates, gain recognition of the legitimacy of their concerns, and change the distribution of decision-making power.**

To support individuals in forming groups and taking collective action, **constituency builders undertake the following tasks, which are explored in this chapter:**

- **Foster the connection of personal interests with broader, shared goals, thereby supporting individual engagement in the group.**
- **Develop a sense of collectivity, which requires buy-in and skills.**
- **Build individual and group capacity to collect, analyze, and use data.**
- **Promote long-term involvement in the group.**
- **Identify and foster local leadership.**

Believing that decision-making must be inclusive to produce quality education for all students, participants pay particular attention to stakeholders who traditionally have been excluded from public debate and policymaking. For some organizations, this includes parents, educators, and others outside the school system who are unwelcome when they try to take on roles as monitors and agents of change in schools and districts. For organizations that focus explicitly on educational equity issues, this generally means those living and working in low-income areas, where chronically low-achieving schools often serve students with minority racial and ethnic backgrounds, immigrants, and English language learners.

Reform efforts can — and do — involve a wide range of established groups, including parent, community, advocacy, and business groups; faith-based organizations; education associations; and others. **For many constituency builders, however, a major challenge and goal is to recruit, engage, and knit together individuals who typically never have pursued collective action for reform — parents, students, community members, teachers, and others.** Such work is necessary for nurturing new groups of activist individuals and networks of local organizations. This chapter largely focuses on such efforts.

Study participants say that moving individuals to collective action generally requires enhancing individuals' capacities — building knowledge about complex education issues such as standards, public school funding, bilingual programs, and facilities repair and construction, as well as fostering skills needed to analyze data and issues, develop strategic plans, deal with public school bureaucracies, speak cogently and assertively in meetings, and interact with educators and public officials. Tapping new strengths and talents can be powerful for those involved, but participants say that individual capacity building is most significant when it also encourages individuals to take on significant reform roles and bolsters collective capacity. Critical individual capacities are those that enhance the group's understanding, action, and viability regarding education policy, decision-making, and practice.

Constituency-building and organizing efforts provide stakeholders with vital arenas, supports, and mechanisms that aim to foster recognition among individuals of their common interests and concerns, and, moreover, of ways to influence institutions such as public education that affect their lives. In the comments on the following pages, study participants consider the development of individual and group capacity and, in particular, the tasks of moving stakeholders from personal concerns

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to systemic perspectives, from individual encounters with a school system to group engagement, and often from private isolation to public roles. Chapter 8 explores some of these themes further, examining strategies for changing power dynamics, roles, and relationships.

From Individual to Member of a Group

Study participants engage individuals both in reform issues and in the group. Often such work starts with "the personal," such as a mother's worry about the lack of books in her child's classroom or a teacher's recognition that the lessons do not make sense to immigrant students. At other times, this work may emerge from a collective dilemma — parents' desire for a new school building that facilitates dual-language learning or community members' concerns about a proposed voucher program. In all instances, study participants stress the need to connect personal stakes and broader issues, to link constituents' commitment to work for reform with the rewards they individually receive in return for their efforts. One participant, the head of a national organization, points out that in promoting sustained engagement, **"we would probably do very well to start with the personal and give more time to the personal. ... That really invests you and invests other people in you in a powerful way."** A local organizer further describes the importance of the personal, emphasizing the need to "create something that [parents] are so engaged by that they will come not because of all the other exterior things [e.g., food, social events, group fellowship]. They are coming because they are intrinsically getting something out of it."

Creating Meaningful Engagement

Study discussants describe a continuum of constituency-building activities, from outreach and recruitment to engagement and long-term commitment. This process is ongoing because constituency builders continually must engage new parents and others, expanding local groups and developing new ones. **The underlying aim throughout the process is to develop knowledgeable, skilled, active "stayers, the people who really dig in their heels and stay year after year," as one participant put it.** These stayers form the core of local efforts, providing stability, continuity, and deep roots; their work includes engaging new constituents to sustain and expand the struggle for reform.

Discussing strategies for developing stayers, study participants cited many ways constituency builders structure change work to enhance what parents get out of it. Activists often design the work to help build individual capacity and gather participants on common ground while simultaneously working toward reform. By embedding such intrinsic value in engagement, the reach and meaning of constituency building, especially for long-term participants, goes beyond achieving particular policy changes, important as these might be, to providing personal returns that are immediate, relevant, and ongoing. Participants' approaches to engagement include the following:

- **Addressing barriers to participation.** This approach often is based, as in the National Coalition of Advocates for Students' work with immigrant families in Florida, on "a person-by-person analysis of the barriers ... and [efforts] to eliminate those on an individual basis," says a study participant. Activities include eliminating language barriers for parents not fluent in English, using nonwritten communication such as community radio in areas with high levels of adult illiteracy, providing accommodations that allow families of core leaders to accompany them at weekend workshops, and generating in-home e-mail communications capacity. One participant, who regularly trains constituents to develop local projects, also says organizations should be flexible in terms of stakeholders' contributions: "I think the more flexible we are with them — so that they are able to do *what* they can do *when* they can do it — the longer they seem to stay."
- **Developing personal vision.** A community organizer underscores the importance of helping parents and other community members articulate what they want for their children and what they expect from public schools. In part, this means creating arenas, such as small meetings or training sessions, in which parents can meet and interact with others who understand their aspirations and can stimulate reflection and exploration.

42

- **Extending personal spheres.** Constituents value opportunities to expand their personal experiences, such as opportunities to meet new people, gain new knowledge and skills, and cross social lines to establish new collegial relationships. Constituency builders can create these opportunities by organizing parent training sessions that draw together parents from various schools; ensuring professional settings for parents attending regional strategy meetings; or developing workshops that involve representatives from various sectors, such as parents, educators, teacher union staff members, and others.

- **Fostering relationships.** Throughout the engagement process — from individuals' first meetings to the long-term involvement of stayers — constituency builders recognize the importance of building and sustaining relationships among constituents, although at times with differing emphases. One study participant, who serves on the board of a citywide parent organization, points out the value of creating social links and friendships that go beyond the work itself: "We encourage ... social activities by which parents and children come together. ... [W]hen we build some connectivity other than just around whatever the task is ... we retain those people for a much longer period of time."

  Several participants recommend integrating such relationship building directly into change efforts themselves, thereby keeping the focus on and enriching the work of reform. For example, meetings might include structured encounters, allowing people to make new acquaintances, or social activities such as a meal or a group sing, fostering informal interaction. In sharing personal histories, one local organizer says, constituents "begin to realize that we come from all kinds of different places, we have diverse experiences, but there is a whole lot of commonality there too."

Dealing with Divisive Issues

Public education debates tend to encapsulate controversial issues that smolder just beneath the surface of American life yet rarely are confronted, such as the tensions of the nation's multiracial, multiethnic, and class-stratified society. Study participants say they often face the thorny challenge of dealing with such powerful and potentially divisive issues. One participant highlights the difficulty of simultaneously trying to acknowledge social pressures, build group cohesion, and promote reform: "There was a presentation by the [research center] in which they recommended labeling racist actions when they occur." She identifies the quandary: "If you say it, you incite divisiveness." For her, the challenge is deciding between "the data versus the strategy," that is, deciding whether to confront a broad range of constituents with data such as student scores, suspension rates, and other statistics of chronically low-performing schools or focus immediately on developing collaborative strategies for reforming instruction, increasing resources, and decreasing class size. Such recurring tensions can be especially problematic when constituency builders try to use inclusive approaches.

At times, activists try to defuse explosive issues and help constituents develop ready responses to anticipated problems. One approach to dealing with divisive issues emphasizes identifying and supporting issues that create common ground among constituents. A participant argues, based on his organizing experience, that finding common ground and when possible steering clear of divisive issues — such as charter schools, zero tolerance, and racism — promotes cooperation and helps avoid increasing discord, confusion, and "intergroup finger-pointing." But many participants do not accept avoidance as a feasible response, looking instead for ways to

> *"What do you do when [some] people's civil rights are being trampled, but you're trying to get everyone together at the table?"*
>
> *— Director of a national group*

43 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

acknowledge and deepen understanding of thorny issues.

One approach is to reframe discussions, in terms of systemic or structural analyses rather than personal experience. Facing race or ethnicity issues, for example, an organizer might initiate dialogue with a data-based advocacy report or center a discussion on "institutional racism," a tactic that is less personalized than targeting a particular teacher perceived as racist by some — but not all — constituents. On the other hand, an organizer might deliberately personalize issues that offer all-too-easy distinctions between "good" and "bad" students, such as dropout, discipline, and tracking policies. For example, the organizer might provide opportunities for interaction among parents, including parents of students placed in low academic tracks or involved in disciplinary processes. By adding a human dimension to such policies, constituency builders can help stakeholders see beyond stereotypes.

At the same time, a study participant recognizes that **"It's hard to jump in when there's a conflict already going on. It's much easier if you build relationships between people over time, over more and more difficult issues, so you have the social capital to work through tough issues."** Such an approach to constituency building entails a long-term strategy that emphasizes group continuity and development. The head of a national organization reinforces this view, recounting a retreat on race issues attended by activists for citywide school reform who had been working for several years alongside each other — sometimes in cooperation, sometimes in opposition. Although attendees did not always agree, they recognized and respected each other's commitment. As a result, they could talk about how race helped shape their perspectives on the city's reform efforts over the years. According to the study participant, this conversation never could have happened without attendees' long-term experience with each other.

> *"What moves [parents] is the love of their children. But you have to take it from that to some collective sense."*
>
> *— A participant with many years of grassroots organizing experience*

Developing a Sense of Collectivity

Though constituents might not always be unified in their concerns or priorities, those who cultivate the ability to work and act as a group understand their relationship with schools differently than those who see themselves as isolated individuals. Participants talked in study forums about how to foster this sense of collectivity. The work often involves developing shared issues that knit together individual concerns.

Without outside support, individuals often lack the means to generate such a sense of collectivity among themselves. Constituency builders help create places — meetings, workshops, training sessions, and so forth — where people can interact. In such places, constituency builders provide mechanisms — a structured one-on-one exchange about personal experiences with the school system, for instance, or an exercise for gathering information about the local school — that allow constituents to articulate common interests and develop a collective stance. At times, constituency builders try to build infrastructure for a sense of group identity.

Building on such commonality, these reformers support constituents' ability to "see the bigger picture [and realize] that they are more powerful if they're together," according to a study participant. Another participant links constituents' personal, shared experiences that offer a foundation for action: "They might focus on one stumbling block — a racist principal, whatever," providing an opportunity to discuss their rights. Developing a sense of legitimacy among stakeholders is critical. Stakeholders may develop this awareness by realizing that a perceived individual problem is actually a group concern; by learning about the rights and responsibilities of students, parents, and educators; or by understanding the structure of a school system's institutional power. In all instances, constituency builders look for ways to:

- **Build constructively on concerns.** For example, teachers in Salinas, California, who were concerned about classroom activities' relevance for bilingual students, worked together to reform teaching practices, first in their own classrooms and then throughout the school.*

- **Provide accessible information.** Workshops, newspaper inserts, and other tools can help constituents understand the intricacies of education issues such as districtwide capital plans and academic standards. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation's materials on school budgets, for example, enable a broad range of stakeholders to grasp this critical information in ways that empower them to act.

- **Help realize the possibilities of action.** Individuals sometimes fail to see the potential for improvement in schools or, if they do, are hesitant to act on it. The joint efforts of educators and parents to research and reform bilingual education policy in Austin, Texas, illustrate how constituencies can be mobilized to recognize and seize opportunities for action.*

- **Generalize constituents' concern for their children and their schools.** This approach, as discussed earlier, seeks a shift from the personal to the systemic. Within such a framework, a reform agenda of "Not just for my child, but for her classmates as well" can become "Not just for her school, but for all schools in the district," and ultimately "Not just for our kids, but also for future students." Such forward-looking thinking came to fruition, for example, in the summer 2001 opening of Washington, D.C.'s Oyster School, which was constructed to meet the long-term needs of its diverse local population.*

While many reformers focus from the start on systemic and policy issues, constituents often begin with very personal and local concerns. Study participants try to help stakeholders see immediate issues within larger frameworks, link local matters to systemic issues, and reframe personal concerns in policy terms. Thus, the lack of supplies in a particular classroom or school can provide the touchstone for an inquiry into the ways supplies are allocated systemwide and, ultimately, recommendations for policy changes. To help stakeholders achieve this critical shift in perspective, study participants say they work to ensure that constituents "buy into" the premises of reform and help enhance the skills necessary to carry out the work of reform.

Getting Constituent Buy-In

The first step is not always easy. "There's a struggle of how to get [people's] buy-in. You have to balance between agitating people's vision, getting the big ideas out there, and taking people where they are but not getting stuck on [minor issues]," says a study participant. In dealing with these tensions, many participants use approaches that respect local perspectives while fostering the shift to systemic concerns. These approaches include:

- **Capitalizing on concrete, specific concerns.** Concerns that are easy to point out can serve as entry points into larger, more complex issues. A study participant with on-the-ground organizing experience says, "School finance is very difficult as an issue because it is very complicated. The

In one example, grassroots leaders from ethnic communities across Florida work in a network that provides business cards, stipends, reimbursements for expenses, and time sheets to help foster in local leaders a sense of "an organizational identity" and "an understanding of what it is like to be in a [professional] workplace, because our meetings are serious."

— A national director

* Chapter 3 provides more information on these examples.

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physical plant [and] the number of computers are pieces that get parents into the school finance issues. You can see these things." The use of data in analyzing specific concerns is discussed further below.

- **Building on personal experiences.** Concerns rooted in personal histories can be the basis for concretizing more abstract matters. In Latino communities, according to a study participant, "you can use cultural pride as an 'in' to curricular change."

- **Asking questions with significant implications.** Posing open-ended but pointed questions can lead constituents to larger issues with systemic ramifications. One participant who helps community members organize says, "I try asking parents, tell me about your scores, tell me about your budget. I try to push them while I respect where they are."

- **Framing and reframing issues.** Constituency builders can help parents grasp larger issues that underpin their immediate concerns. For example, an issue that loomed large for some parents but seemed silly to others had important systemic roots, according to a study participant: "I had one experience with a parent group divided over a dress code. I listened and said, 'The issue isn't the dress code. It's how policy is enforced, inequitable enforcement.' Because kids were being treated differently when they came to school not meeting the code. I try to help [parents] see the bigger picture."

Developing Constituent Skills

Some study participants insist that collectivity must entail individuals' ability "to separate their public and private selves [and] ... to take a role in a public situation or in a public sense," as the head of a national organization puts it. Constituents with a sense of legitimacy and the knowledge and skills to raise questions in public situations can call for accountability, reframe issues, and suggest remedies. As a long-time grassroots organizer says, "It's about helping people develop skills for collective analysis and action."

Participants see the need for training in many overlapping areas, including:

- **Immediate skill needs.** These are directly relevant skills, such as helping parents think through and practice conversing with their children's teachers. Such training engages parents through a recognized need, lays groundwork for inquiries into broader education concerns, and starts developing skills for increasingly public roles.

- **Participation and leadership skills.** A broad range of skills are needed to analyze information, make decisions, communicate, and take action. Constituency builders help individuals enhance their analytic and strategic skills, such as working on a team, speaking out for oneself, listening effectively, asking "hard questions," identifying issues, grasping political and bureaucratic contexts, and acting strategically. These skills can be learned, expanded, and practiced through training sessions, interacting with group members, observing professional organizers and constituency leaders, and taking an increasingly active role in meetings and group efforts. Other skills, such as running a meeting, can be learned by observing meetings and undertaking roles of increasing responsibility and visibility. Constituents can hone skills associated with more public roles — such as speaking in public, interacting with officials, and responding to journalists — by participating in role-play exercises, developing and practicing a

> *"If there is not any mechanism for [parents and other stakeholders] to learn skills to engage districts, each other, and bureaucracies, then it falls apart because all they're doing is knocking their heads against walls."*
>
> *— A local organizer*

script, observing others in public roles, and participating in group analyses of strengths, weaknesses, and gains of public actions.

- **Other technical expertise.** To ensure that constituents can take advantage of up-to-date technology, study participants say they help parents and others develop technical skills such as the ability to participate in video conferencing and use computers. Constituents learn to use computers particularly for word processing, the Internet for research, and e-mail for ongoing communication with each other and with other groups.

Using Data

Among the various strategies employed by constituency builders, the use of data is pivotal. Knowing how to access, understand, and use data are essential skills for assuming decision-making roles and fostering collective action and power.

The use of data can be a powerful educational tool that helps all audiences grasp patterns and trends in school systems, most especially regarding inequities and exclusion. For many groups, the intent of helping parents and communities look at data is so they can see clearly the ways in which some groups receive inferior schooling. Moreover, stakeholders cannot help shape school policy without a substantive grasp of procedures and issues. Yet relevant information can be difficult to obtain and understand. Because certain issues provide strategic entry points to the heart of policy and practice, they are of particular interest to some study participants. For example, a participant says, knowledge about school budgets provides "very powerful expertise" on an issue "that takes you downtown pretty fast." Work on such topics, as well as high-visibility issues such as vouchers, can be seen as a "laboratory for parent leadership development."

Throughout the study, discussions arose repeatedly about the meanings and uses of data. Participants examined ways to build skills and create tools that enable constituents to collect, understand, analyze, and use data. Participants also raised data issues more indirectly, describing instances in which data played prominent roles. By the end of the study, it was clear that the use of data represents an essential means of building constituency and changing power dynamics.

Engaging Stakeholders in Data Use

Participants use various approaches for making data accessible to, meaningful for, and usable by stakeholders, including:

- **Building on personal experience.** Participants often begin data training by providing information that is personally relevant to parents and other stakeholders. This training may involve, for example, disseminating information about tests children take, demonstrating how to read a child's school files, or providing disaggregated data that illuminate performance patterns. Starting with such concrete, meaningful data can help demystify the often intimidating concept of "data," illustrate the potential of data-driven strategies and arguments, and broaden perspectives about the kinds of data to use.

- **Using accessible examples and metaphors.** Participants help constituents decode education lingo and understand the relevance of abstract concepts such as "curriculum" or "academic achievement." One study participant argues that constituency builders must be inventive in demonstrating the meaning of various data. For example: "Help parents think about [the definition of] learning [by asking them] what they are good at [and] how they know they are good. Then ask them if they could tell they're good if they were given a paper test. Most parents say 'no,' and they have an epiphany."

- **Using clear contrasts.** Some activists stress the value of identifying "one issue where there's a clear contrast, a clear chunk of inequity" that stakeholders can grasp and "hold onto," in the words of one participant.

- **Starting early on.** To help constituents become increasingly comfortable with data collection and use, study participants recommend using data-driven strategies from the early stages of constituency building and training. Such strategies should be simple and clear, especially at first. "A research action might just be setting up a meeting with a school district person to see who is responsible for a particular area," suggests a

participant. Over time, constituents can devise and employ increasingly sophisticated data strategies.

Data Training

Study participants generally agree that training local parents, community members, teachers, organizers, and others to use data is "very energizing." Training is important because, without it, the tasks of identifying, analyzing, and using critical information can be overwhelming. The kinds of data that participants cite as accessible, engaging, and useful for constituents include:

- **Comparative data.** Direct comparisons communicate patterns and relationships with stark clarity. One participant says, "What really fires up [stakeholders] are, one, cross-campus comparisons and, two, comparisons of what they should have based on Title 1 — are they getting it? By doing this, you can get [parents and others] out of the spiral of blaming their own selves or their context."
- **Disaggregated data.** Data disaggregated by social characteristics — such as family income, ethnic or racial group, English proficiency, or gender — often provide useful and realistic pictures of what is happening in a classroom, school, or school system, including patterns of inequitable allocation of resources. Data can also point to trends in teaching and learning problems that need special attention. Several participants argue that such data, although often difficult to obtain, "can be eye-opening" for parents, teachers, and other constituents.
- **Mapping data.** Certain data can be useful in locating resources in districts and communities, identifying pockets of decision-making power, and recognizing potential allies and beneficial networks. Study participants say such data are important for helping constituents grasp the dynamics of and influence school debates.
- **Outcome data.** Participants also named specific data that parents should have and understand. These data, disaggregated into relevant groupings and compared across schools, include test scores, suspension and expulsion rates, special education rates, and graduation rates. Also useful are school rankings — across the district or state — according to meaningful indicators, such as resources available, certified staff, and class size.

Study participants also stress that data include many different kinds of information. Often researchers use the term "data" to refer only to quantitative data such as test scores, dropout rates, and attendance records. Study participants argue that qualitative data — gathered through interviews, observations, surveys, focus groups, and other means — are equally important and valid for consideration. These data often are more revealing of attitudes, motivations, and causal factors that underpin numbers and statistics. **Although quantitative data are necessary for understanding *what* is happening, qualitative data can show *why* and *how* an event or trend is occurring.**

Using Data Collection and Analysis in Constituency Building

As study participants discuss uses of data, critical questions arise: Who decides what data to collect? Who collects information? How are data used? One participant points to the central quandary of whether to give parents raw data or "to chunk it. Do I go through [the collection process] with you? Or do I create a thumbnail for you and ask you to act?" Variations in participants' responses are based largely on their differing aims: Is data collection and analysis meant to strengthen participation and leadership skills? Or is it mainly meant to underpin advocacy for reform?

> *"You have to distinguish between data that make people angry versus data that make people overwhelmed or depressed. Data need to be simple and actionable."*
>
> *— A local organizer and trainer*

48

Most often the two aims overlap, but it is useful to unravel them to understand particular strategies and outcomes. Some groups use data collection and analysis as ways of building constituency, participation skills, and local leadership. For example:

- **Parents for Public Schools (PPS)** uses a **mapping exercise** as part of the application process for forming a PPS chapter. The exercise serves various purposes. Parents in the core group learn about their community; identify resources, potential allies, and threats; and learn how to access data. According to a study participant, the exercise also "teaches the core group that each individual has a responsibility in getting [the chapter] started" and helps define an initial focus, pushing the group to develop a data-driven agenda and strategy for reform.

- **The Metropolitan Organization,** an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate, establishes **parent research action teams** to build skills and confidence, as well as gather data. A local organizer says, "You try to get people to organize themselves, and part of that is gathering data. Parents set up a meeting to get information from a person, like a school official. If that person can't provide them with the information they need, they ask if they should talk to someone else. The organizer helps ... people ... evaluate how that meeting moved them forward."

- Several organizations, such as the **Intercultural Development Research Association, the National Coalition of Advocates for Students,** and the **Interfaith Education Fund,** cite constituents' **reflections and self-evaluations** as important data in developing constituency skills. One participant says that reflection and evaluation "is part of an ongoing strategy. 'What worked? What didn't?' That way you get people to learn how to pursue, hard, an idea — [to learn] how to be persistent." Another stresses, "Every action taken is a lab. Just because you don't move forward with a particular action [it isn't wasted effort]. You can always analyze and learn."

Developing "Stayers"

As noted earlier, study participants see outreach, recruitment, engagement, and other activities as vital steps in securing active constituent participation in reform efforts. Yet, for various reasons (explored further in Chapter 9), many engaged constituents do not remain focused on public education reform for the long haul. Families come and go in school districts, individual concerns are resolved, and children graduate or drop out of school. In addition, stakeholders with little free time face tough choices about where to concentrate their activism. Within this shifting context, constituency builders often face demanding and ongoing rounds of identifying, recruiting, and training constituents just to maintain levels of involvement, let alone expand efforts. **At the same time, participants try to develop knowledgeable, skilled, active "stayers" who comprise the "core membership" of reform over the long run. Stayers provide continuity, stability, and consistency; help train, mentor, and support newer recruits; and embed reform work in their communities.**

Study participants identified three aspects of constituency building that help determine whether constituents become stayers: ongoing mentoring, social networks, and meaningful work.

Ongoing Mentoring and Coaching

One participant, the head of a national organization who has experience in hands-on constituency building, echoes the comments of colleagues, saying, **"The issue that has emerged as being larger than the actual training has been having the capacity, either through our own staff or through parents coaching other parents, to do ongoing mentoring and coaching. It is this capacity ... that really builds the stayers."** Important practices include training and supporting local trainers, such as parents and other community members, to train other stakeholders and provide ongoing mentoring support. This approach has multiple benefits, including development of a pool of trainers who are rooted in the local effort and remain with it after professional staff turn to other neighborhoods. This train-the-trainer approach encourages peer learning and provides an opportunity for constituents to grow into new roles — mentoring and coaching — that allow them to share their experiences, skills, and knowledge. Constituency builders also help structure and nurture local

networks of stakeholders. Some study participants incorporate new technologies, particularly the use of e-mail, into this work, providing both training and equipment. Using these tools, each local mentor can communicate quickly with professional staff and other mentors — continuing to benefit from long-distance training and peer exchange while training and mentoring others locally.

Developing Networks

Study participants stress that stayers value social networks that provide a sense of community among constituents. A network may be an organized group that meets regularly, people linked through mutual recognition of their long-term commitment to reform, or a support system for mentoring and exchanging ideas. Despite this variety, participants agree that networks are important in developing and supporting stayers. In general, a network can provide fertile ground for leadership development, support and further reform work, and elicit and sustain stayers' commitment. Networks can function in many ways, including the following:

- Serve as an important support group in daily work, providing a sense of vital encouragement and common effort.
- Help break down a sense of isolation, "reconnecting people to the larger picture" and "re-energizing them to go out and fight again," according to a study participant.
- Provide opportunities for peer coaching and mentoring. One study participant uses "theme conference calls" on fund raising, media relations, and other issues to link "already established chapter leaders" with new leaders. Another uses e-mail to develop "a leadership network [through which] people can coach each other, so that ... people who have the most experience [are] able to help the others along."

Translating Vision into Action

Collective action can help constituents build deep bonds and commitment to reform work, to each other, and to their common vision. A participant, speaking of reform of an entire school system, says, "For actually years, there was a whole set of people who were just enormously active. ... Part of it was that there was a real shared sense of vision. There was not agreement. People fought like cats and dogs. But there was a real sense of being joined at the hip ... of people in this for the long haul, going to make it work, going to work it through, going to fight it out."

At times, the work, relationships, and new experiences together represent a profound kind of personal development. Stayers can gain a sense of growth, accomplishment, and personal meaning that strengthens their work and helps further reform.

Promoting Local Leadership

Constituency builders say they must identify and foster local leaders to support ownership of target issues, promote meaningful involvement among stakeholders, and build local capacity. All organizations studied put a premium on developing local leaders who can raise grassroots issues; establish an authenticity based on "real" constituent engagement; and assume visible roles that carry responsibility, authority, and influence. At the same time, professional staff engaged in constituency building remain sensitive to possible tensions between themselves and constituents as to who is "the anointer of leadership," as one participant says. These tensions can make identification of local leaders difficult. Although participating organizations seek to draw leadership, priorities, and deci-

> *"I think the thing that has kept those [individuals] in is their sense of their own development, that they are different people today than they were before, and that they are actors, that they are public persons who have to be dealt with."*
>
> *— A local organizer, referring to a 25-year-old organization that has drawn on the same group of constituents since its inception*

sions from grassroots constituents, all face the challenge of providing leadership themselves while shifting leadership to local activists. To meet this challenge, staff must walk a fine line between overstepping prerogatives and leaving leadership gaps.

> *"To be a leader, somebody has to invest you with leadership."*
>
> *— A national group director*

Discussing how to identify parents and other stakeholders with leadership potential, study participants emphasize two approaches. The first approach focuses on personal attributes that signal leadership potential. A constituency builder might look for an "activist personality," a person who is high-energy, observant, and analytic. This type of person takes initiative, adopts a problem-solving stance, and already is active in the community. One participant notes that personal leadership can be reflected in other ways as well, including some — such as a quiet posture in group situations — that do not immediately attract attention. The challenge, she argues, is to be flexible enough to engage a range of personality types. A "personal styles" workshop, for example, can make constituents aware of their leadership qualities and able to work with "resistant personalities" in school systems.

A second approach to identifying constituent leaders focuses on the "invested quality" of leadership. **Participants emphasize that individuals must be invested with leadership by other constituents, not constituency builders.** "[A]n operative definition [of what] we are looking for is people who have followers, who have networks of relationships," another participant observes. A third participant stresses the importance of recognizing anyone the community has identified as a leader, even if she does not seem to have "leadership qualities." This recommendation may be especially relevant in highly stable communities, such as rural communities. There, a family's length of residence, church membership, traditional role, or social position can be pivotal factors in defining local leadership, factors that might not be evident immediately to constituency builders. In these instances, a study participant points out, a constituency builder must "enhance not only what the community folks already find in [the leaders], but enhance what ... they are doing and what they need to do in order to sustain ... the process of reform." Such enhancement might include helping the leader understand her position's potential or finding ways to exert her leadership.

Two important considerations arise from reformers' concepts of local leadership, despite differences among various approaches. First, constituency builders encourage individuals with leadership potential, whether that potential is evident in personal qualities, an existing community role, or both. Constituency builders try to engage these constituents in trainings and meetings to support reform activities and broaden their conceptions of their roles in the community. Second, in many instances, **constituency builders look to build on established networks of leaders, support and extend those networks, and develop participatory and leadership skills in others along the way.** These reformers do not try to build leadership capacity and networks from scratch. In this sense, the existing resources and capacity of a community are key ingredients for organizing collective action.

CHAPTER SIX

Building on Diversity

The increasing diversity in the United States shapes, strengthens, and often challenges public school reform efforts. Early reports on 2000 census data show a nation populated with growing numbers of immigrants from a broad range of cultures, as well as great variety among languages used on an everyday basis. Such diversity is not new in American life; rather, the recent surge adds to the country's historic mix of races, ethnicities, and religions. In addition, economic and class differences abound; although the economic floor is moving up for all groups, the gap is widening between the rich and the poor.

It is no surprise that public schools reflect this diversity. Public education is one of the nation's few institutional arenas that can — and sometimes does — cut across social lines to bring children of varied backgrounds together in the same place, at the same time, around a common purpose. In addition, public schools increasingly face issues — and often tensions — that are perceived to be rooted in diversity, such as differences between dietary practices and cafeteria offerings, texts of questionable appropriateness for the classroom, holiday celebrations tied to cultural or religious traditions, and, broadly, differing views about the role of education as a means of socialization into "American" life or as a means of preserving cultural heritages.

Constituency builders help individuals interact, form groups, and act collectively across social divisions to change power dynamics, build public will for reform, and leverage change. As discussed below, study participants work with a wide variety of social groupings; even reformers who work within one ethnic or racial group often encounter social divisions that they help bridge. This chapter looks at study participants' constituency-building work against the backdrop of diversity.

The chapter examines:

- **the meaning of "diversity" for reformers;**
- **the added value to reform work of bridging diversity;**
- **strategic approaches to diversity; and**
- **the challenges of fostering common goals across social lines.**

Practicing Inclusion: The Broad Range of "Diversity"

As noted earlier, study participants stress the importance of including all stakeholders in debates and decision-making processes of education policy and practice. Inclusion, they say, is needed to make quality, equitable education available for all children. These activists deliberately work to build constituency across various social groupings. Even those organizations that work with an equity lens to focus on particular racial, ethnic, and cultural groups encounter the challenge of bringing together diverse groups, such as parents and educators in the Salinas, California, example or parents with and without literacy skills in Florida (see Chapter 3).

In addition, constituency builders face a range of diversity that includes divisions not always discernable to outsiders. Moreover, because issues of race, class, ethnicity, culture, language, and immigrant status intertwine in many ways in American society, constituency builders seldom deal in clear-cut terms with just one or two of these social categories. Instead, it is a matter of focusing on which, in a particular instance, are the most relevant categories, while also trying to take others into account. The following descriptions, gleaned from study group discussions and individual interviews, illuminate the multiple aspects of "diversity" with which activists cope as they try to knit together individuals and small groups into effective constituencies:

- **Across race.** Constituency building must be "grounded in an understanding of historical context; acknowledgement of the existence and impact of personal and institutional racism upon children, families, and communities; and commitment to building a just, multiracial U.S. society. Unless constituency building for school reform is also committed to this broader goal, it will fail to improve schools in ways that matter for children of color."

- **Across class.** "It's not a black and white issue for many. In [one region we work in], people don't want integration, but it's integration with poor people that they don't want — it's not so much about race as long as people have money. It's *class* issues. ... I've actually found that it's harder to bring parents together across class lines."

- **Within race but across educational attainment.** "There's a lot of tension between and within the different communities. There are divisions within the black community, between those who are educated and those who are not, [just] as in the white community."

- **Across class and race.** "People will tolerate [minority] parents in affluent communities, but somehow they are seen differently. Schools don't think that they have to tolerate [minority] parents in poor communities. ... It's race and class."

- **Across immigrant status.** "There's so much misunderstanding of each other and so many stereotypes, and it's fraught with tension because people see each other as ripping each other off, sometimes literally. People perceive immigrants as taking their jobs."

- **Across language, culture, race, and organizational interests.** "We have a really bad problem here across every divide. Whether it is Asian, Hispanic, whomever, everybody owns their own group, and this is one of the things we have been trying to bridge and trying to figure out — just how can we bridge that gap."

- **Across geographic lines and school boundaries.** A grassroots organizer points out that "diversity is multilayered. For example, I've been doing a lot of work with parents and teachers from four schools. ... Some of these schools are very close to each other, as close as half a mile, and yet there was no relationship among them. This is an all Latino community, and the schools are in close proximity, but they were very isolated from each other. ... In this community, we're working within the same ethnicity and language, but it's still across lines — school zone lines."

  Another study participant, also working with a population relatively homogenous in race and setting, finds a different kind of geographic diversity: "[S]ince they are a county organization, they have to make sure ... even if it is a predominantly white rural county ... that all the towns are represented. A lot of times people make the assumption that rural areas are homogenous, and they are not. ... That is just one way I try to encourage them to bring everyone together, even if it is not necessarily a whole lot of various racial groups in that particular county or school system."

- **Across groups with varying relationships to public education.** For some constituents, including students, parents, and educators, their roles as stakeholders in public education are quickly evident. But for others — including groups such as faith-based organizations and social service agencies as well as members of the general public — their stakeholder status may not readily be apparent. Many study participants strive to involve stakeholders in education across institutional, organizational, and demographic divides. A head of a national organization says, for example: "I want to involve all areas of the community, both geographically and demographically. This would include people without children in public schools — the elderly, people without children, people with children in private schools. How do you get them to be invested in public education even though they do not have children in the public education system?"

- **Across parents with different experiences in public schools.** An experienced organizer points out the significance of experiential differences: "I've

> *"There's diversity across institutions that don't normally work with each other. ... We got three schools and three churches — a Baptist, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic church — to go together to a hearing of the county commissioner's court to say that granting the [liquor] license is against the community's interest."*
>
> *— A local organizer*

got parents who are on the local school council and who are often paid to do part-time volunteer work in and around the schools and who show up on every committee at the school. ... And then I've got ... parents who are really angry at the school, so angry they won't even come in and deal with it because they don't think they'll get anywhere. ... There are a lot of efforts we've put in ... to build a broader base that includes [both kinds of] parents together." Another constituency builder talks about how social groupings become embedded in the structure of the school system: "Parents are so conditioned to be divided by race, class, program lines — for example, special education or gifted and talented."

- **Across institutional lines.** A study participant, whose organization operates at the citywide level, asserts that although "much of the discussion has focused on principals and teachers and insiders and parents ... there are many more people besides parents who care about the school system." The point elicits ready agreement from another participant who works at the local level: "[T]hat's why it is so important for us that we also organize the other institutions in the neighborhood, the congregations, the businesses. That provides the broad-based organizing with an external power base to draw from."

Bridging Diversity and Adding Value

Despite many challenges, constituency builders in the study work hard to bridge social groupings, for example, bringing together stakeholders from many schools in a city; or recruiting stakeholders to represent a city's ethnic, racial, and geographic mix; or drawing leaders from across stakeholder sectors; or creating a network of parents from various ethnic, language, and cultural groups. Through this work, study participants have found that engaging constituents from diverse social groups adds value in many ways. **When constituency builders can crack through groups' preconceptions of each other and foster the ability to view situations through others' perspectives, reform efforts can draw on the experiences and expertise of a relatively wide range of groups as well as gain leverage based on the buy-in of diverse groups.**

A constituency builder who is leading a citywide process of visioning, strategic planning, and implementing systemwide reform says:

> I think accountability — the concept of 'results,' the concept of 'for all children,' 'closing the achievement gap,' 'beyond a culture of mediocrity to ... building high-performing learning communities' — all of those things ... cross sector boundaries. ... I think that there is a lot of common analysis of what some of the impediments of the old system are to building the new. ...
>
> The rethinking-school teachers ... progressive educators in the best sense of the word — sitting at the table with the president of the ... business council, the president of the chamber, and the mayor ... trying to find the common ground that is not the least common denominator. ... Not every issue are you going to get 100 percent agreement on, but ... there is a lot of common-sense agreement that can be forged between people. ...
>
> [B]eing on a board that the police chief is on and that parent leaders are on and that the leader of the largest minority youth development organization is on, a couple of maverick principals, is not as comfortable to [business leaders] as sitting

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> with 50 guys that look just like themselves. … [But] the more that they get into schools and … see what life is like managing in this era, the more they become sensitive to the complexities here. … Some of the stereotypes and the knee-jerk thinking … start to break down a little bit.

Other study participants agree that intentionally diversifying involved stakeholders can enrich both analyses of and approaches to reform in important ways. One study participant, the head of a national organization, says the group's "overriding strategy" in constituency building is "to always involve cross-sectoral groups, so we work with people … who work for school districts (central office, principals, teachers, union leadership) as well as parents and community."

Another study participant points out that **a constituent group's diversity also can help undercut schools' tendency to label activists as "troublemakers" or "agitators."** The participant says, "We do not want [a chapter] to be all one school or all one neighborhood because too quickly you become labeled and become ineffective."

At times, work with one constituency can help develop a new, broader, more diverse constituency group. In one instance, a study participant provided computers for parents to use in their homes to foster peer support networks. Drawn by the computers and helping their parents use them, several adolescents became engaged in reform work as well, an unintentional but "really good intergenerational aspect" of the strategy, said the constituency builder. This participant also "found, particularly in the Latino community, [that] we've had a large number of high school students that come to the meetings with their parents and who become good on-the-ground advocates in their schools." This type of serendipitous introduction of youth into reform efforts can lead to more intentional engagement strategies. Another participant notes, "The young people told us that these [project] approaches weren't the way to bring in young people … . They were bored … . They brought in theater, music. Their ideas were much more fun."

Beyond the importance of bringing diverse stakeholders to the table to identify issues, develop reform strategies, and advocate, study participants cited other values of deliberately addressing diversity. These include strengthened engagement strategies, enhanced individual and group capacities, and extended group resources. Other benefits include:

- **Broadening personal experience.** People get to meet new people, often from different social groupings — from different places, classes, or ethnic or racial groups, for example. One study participant points out that such encounters — especially when structured around a joint effort over an extended time — often are rare experiences for those involved. Even amid great diversity, many people remain isolated in their own social groups. On their own, they can find it difficult to have meaningful interaction across social lines. Describing a meeting that gathered stakeholders from various backgrounds, the participant says: "People really got into the mix of language — it was all bilingual — and racially [there was diversity] — and that provided the energy for the meeting. **There are not many other places where people can meet across social lines where there is an intentionality about topics and then a discussion on 'How can we work together on something we care about?' "**
- **Fostering connections.** Linking parents across ethnic, racial, and geographic lines can help mitigate the sense of isolation that often accompanies reform work — the sense that other efforts "are really humming along" and that "it is only at my school [that] there must be something wrong," as

> *"[D]iverse and larger groups are more effective typically … . If you have three different racial groups coming together around a certain issue, it's pretty hard to say, 'Oh well. That's just them.' "*
>
> *— A local organizer*

a study participant said. Another participant, who has been involved with various ethnic and cultural groups for years, says such links can build bridges not only *across* but also *within* racial and linguistic groups. Describing a constituency-building effort among bilingual populations, the participant notes that Latinos from many countries and Asians from "about six different language and ethnically diverse Asian populations" are developing networks both within their Latino and Asian communities and jointly with each other. Such connections can give constituents a sense of the priorities they hold in common and their shared commitment to a larger effort. "Sometimes [the core leaders meet] all together, which they really like because it gives them energy and a real sense of not being alone and being part of something larger," says the participant.

- **Enriching discussions.** A widely used constituency-building approach seeks to help individuals broaden their perspectives, interact with others across social divides, and learn to listen effectively to people who might offer other relevant perspectives. By enhancing personal experience, these interactions can help stakeholders strengthen their commitment to reform and move from personal to systemic outlooks. In addition, such interactions can enrich the work of the group, multiplying the supply of experiences and perspectives from which it draws. A constituency builder who works with stakeholders from several schools in his city says, "Typically we have done [meetings] in clusters of schools, eight to 10 parents from three or four schools that are working with us in the same area. ... We found that the conversations have been much richer ... when we have the diverse group of people together."

- **Encouraging comparative learning.** Parents involved in networks of constituencies and organizations have opportunities to learn from a variety of issues and diverse approaches to reform. An organizer who fosters parent engagement in statewide reform finds that parents who attend training sessions for reform efforts "have a clear understanding of what's supposed to be happening in their [own] schools and how they can be involved in that." When stakeholders from various schools meet, they raise "issues that actually occur across schools." This broader perspective can help move the problem "out of the personal politics of the school."

Working Strategically with Diversity

Constituency builders recognize the challenges of creating diverse constituencies, especially in a society that tends toward fragmentation instead of commonality and highlights individuality instead of the common good. In the quotes and examples above, activists refer to the demands as well as the rewards of bridging social divides. Although working across racial, ethnic, and class lines perhaps poses the most visible challenges, all efforts to knit together social groups — whatever the lines that divide them — run against the grain of many social trends. Participants use various methods of intentionally building diverse constituencies within this social context. The following section summarizes those methods.

Establishing Relations with and among Diverse Constituencies

Participants talked about various and, at times, overlapping approaches to engaging a range of constituencies. These include:

- **Cross-sectoral constituency building,** a strategy of constituency building among stakeholder sectors, including school district employees, union leaders, parents and other community members, city administrators, higher education professionals, and local elected officials. See Chapter 7 for a discussion of inside/outside strategies for linking those "inside" school systems with parents, community members, and others "outside" those systems.

- **Developing community networks** by building relationships *among* community-based organizations, including those that do not readily recognize their stake in schools, such as service providers, community development corporations, faith-based groups, and immigrant organizations. Such networking complements and supplements

efforts to build relationships *between* school-based and community-based organizations.

- **Reflecting demographics** by explicitly recruiting key constituents from across racial, economic, and geographic lines to "be representative of the city." These people may include those already involved in community issues, active in community groups, or known to be concerned about local schools.

- **Targeting constituencies strategically** or, as one study participant put it, "trying to find communities where there are people and institutions that look like [they have] the potential to work together and figure out how they can build the power ultimately to be able to be successful in taking action."

Using Issues That Unite

To build constituencies, study participants generally agree that it is important to identify and use issues that unite instead of divide. A constituency builder steeped in local organizing talks about what happens when diverse stakeholders recognize common ground: **"You can establish changes, differences in how people relate to each other. This happens principally when they see a common interest and they fight and win together. They come to value each other. Teachers see parents come out to meetings. They see that they need each other."**

Constituency builders look in particular for "win-win" and neutral issues as bases for uniting various groups in meaningful reform efforts. A win-win issue promises benefits to diverse sectors of the community. For example, advanced certification for teachers can act as a win-win issue. Encouraging teachers to earn certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards provides benefits across a range of stakeholders — teachers get prestige and career opportunities, schools gain a positive reputation and status, and parents and students get better-qualified teachers. In addition, employers, civic leaders, and others throughout the community welcome the prospect of graduates who are better prepared for careers and adult responsibilities. Constituency builders also can find it helpful to center on issues that are substantive but perceived as neutral in that they do not fragment constituencies. The 21st Century School Fund finds, for example, that facilities issues can unite parents, students, community members, educators, and administrators, and often open the way for conversations on more sensitive teaching and learning issues.

Groups do not have to agree on every issue to work together on a particular issue. According to a participant, "The voucher issue galvanized a lot of support in terms of people who are for public education that came from very different groups, from Jewish support groups to clergy for the separation of church and state. ... [I]t was also a useful time to get, for example, non-English-speaking parents from parts of San Antonio to connect with some African American representatives from Houston and El Paso. ... [We] set up a retreat a month ago with 17 people there representing teachers, unions, a variety of people representing state and local groups. What we see is that the voucher issue is very useful to establish and reinforce connections around the state. It cuts across race and class lines." Yet many of these groups have opposing interests on other topics.

In addition, participants look for issues with educational significance — those that relate directly to teaching and learning. Many issues can inspire activism that has educational impact while also bringing together educators, parents, students, the community, and others into cohesive constituencies — in, for example, a push for smaller class size or stakeholder engagement in school-based budgets. Other issues, however vital and beneficial for constituencies, do not offer the same impact for education reform. For example, one discussant points out the difficulty of moving "beyond the simple issues — shutting down a crack house — to teaching and learning issues."

Developing Strategic Timing

Study participants cite a variety of approaches to timing the joining of diverse groups. Some argue the advantages of identifying "natural opportunities" for gathering diverse populations and organizations. For example, an issue that many sectors might agree upon, such as a fight against overcrowding or for bilingual education, can provide such an opportunity. Such natural opportunities can help promote successful joint efforts because they are limited to particular issues, draw on established concerns, and may not threaten other organizational interests. Moreover, success in capitalizing on a natural opportunity can lead to

future joint efforts. In other cases, participants use long-term strategies that, from the start, intentionally unite stakeholders from various sectors or social groups. Such strategies aim to enrich reform conversations, foster inclusiveness, and leverage the legitimacy and power of diversity. In still other situations, participants emphasize the necessity of building constituency *within* communities — developing skills and knowledge, building ties and networks, and fostering community-based and parent-driven work — before trying to forge links *across* groups, and especially before working with educators. In these situations, the in-group work helps strengthen constituents' sense of legitimacy and clarifies goals before they interact with others.

> *"We had to get people comfortable with each other's language and voice. People literally had trouble understanding each other. Immigrant parents spoke with accents that were sometimes heavy. They had trouble understanding African American dialect."*
>
> *— A state group director, referring to an urban effort*

Working to bridge diversity inevitably raises questions of power, status, skills, and experience. How, for example, can nonprofessional community members work on par with professionals who are used to the dynamics and politics of setting agendas, establishing frameworks, and making decisions in meetings? **Coming to "the table" does not guarantee equal seating. Constituency builders try to structure equity into reform processes.** Thus, they might engage various stakeholder groups at different stages in the constituency-building process, thereby supporting those who traditionally have less voice in policy debates. For example, a public engagement effort focused on defining a "sound, basic education" deliberately engaged community groups, education advocates, parent groups, and others before inviting professional educators, who often dominate such discussions.

The Challenge of Achieving Equitable Participation

Simply bringing together people of different backgrounds does not ensure a common conversation, let alone collaboration on a shared endeavor. Even after stakeholders agree to meet, challenges abound and can affect decisions about when, where, and how to bring people together. All study participants recognize the need for personal and group skills to interact constructively amid diversity. Some challenges are rooted in the most basic logistics of communication. A participant points to the need for constituents to "have the patience to interact with people with different languages and different backgrounds," at times a difficult attribute to find. Other challenges to efforts that value equity and inclusion arise from the norms of inequity and exclusion that pervade society. To counter assumptions and expectations that could undermine constituency building amid diversity, study participants suggest in-group training that promotes cooperation across diverse groups, including "diversity training for leaders where you allow them, in small forums, to talk very directly about race and ethnicity."

Several participants acknowledge difficulty in narrowing the power gap between school professionals and parents, especially in terms of institutional power. This issue, discussed more fully in Chapter 7, illustrates the dynamics that come into play when constituency builders assemble groups with different backgrounds, experiences, expertise, and relationships to education policy. One study participant, who works with both teachers and parents, describes the early struggle of a reform effort to "help [teachers] see parents and others in the community as having even stronger interests in [the teaching reform] than theirs. ... [The organization] pushed the teachers to reach out, to do home visits and contact parents. Teachers were the gatekeepers. It was hard to get [parents included] on the teachers' agendas." Participants also aim to close the power gap with a variety of other tools. Mechanisms such as home visits and community walks are meant to pull teachers out of their classrooms to meet parents and other community members in the world of their daily lives. Other mechanisms train educators in ways to collaborate with parents,

reframe educators' views of parents from a "deficit" to an "asset" perspective, or create an understanding that "there is real value in the community." The institutional power base that educators enjoy, however, often is seen as overwhelming, perhaps even beyond the control of well-meaning educators. One constituency builder declares forcefully, "I no longer trust public school-based parent outreach and involvement programs, especially in relationship to people of color. It's like a vacuum. People get sucked into their school institution, school control."

Yet another perspective is provided by a study participant who oversees a citywide effort to develop a shared vision and strategies for systemwide reform. The effort's overarching priorities include a leadership agenda and a capacity-building agenda. Initial capacity-building activities, according to the participant, focused on developing skilled principals who could provide leadership in "this new era of collaboration, of parent involvement, of shared decision-making ... of change, of result-based education." Although the quote emphasizes principal training, it also underscores the need for all actors to grasp changes in the world of school reform — a world in which reformers' achievements in building engaged constituencies, bringing previously silent voices into the debate, bridging social divides, and enlarging the circle of decision-makers are increasingly becoming factors that must be taken into account in the day-to-day work of schools.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Addressing Inside/Outside Dynamics

Study participants see constituency building as vital to school reform partly because it changes relevant roles, relationships, and power dynamics. Some of the most challenging relationships to build are between constituents who are "insiders" and those who are "outsiders." **This chapter explores:**

- **how constituency builders define who is inside and who is outside,**
- **why many constituency builders see building inside/outside relationships as pivotal to their work,**
- **common characteristics of inside/outside work, and**
- **challenges that constituency builders face in bridging inside/outside divisions.**

All organizations participating in this study operate independently of any school system, and all work with noneducators, if not exclusively, then as one of their primary constituencies. Yet participants recognize that improving students' experiences and outcomes depends on changing education policies and educators' practices. Even when constituents secure legal mandates for change, the success of reform efforts depends largely on the willingness of those responsible for implementing change. Monitoring and enforcement in every school and classroom is neither feasible nor, many would argue, desirable. In addition, educators constitute a major political force in many places. For these reasons, many constituency builders seek constructive relationships between those working or exerting influence in the education system and those outside it. For some study participants, these cross-sector relationships reside at the core of the work, which they see as building civic capacity for systemic reform.

In reshaping inside/outside dynamics, constituency builders confront a division rooted in institutional structure, history, and perceptions. State and local legislation and district policies vest local decision-making authority in school boards, superintendents, principals, and other officials. Policies mandating inclusive decision-making, a common aim of reform, remain rare, and their implementation more so. Efforts to emphasize credentials and insulate education from politics have contributed to a perception that education is the realm of experts, having little room or need for family or community input.

Barriers to collaboration stem from individuals' experiences, as well. One local organizer describes a constituent who was active on other issues but so angry about her grandchildren's experiences at school that she refused, for a long time, to discuss education. Other study participants have worked with parents who are reluctant to talk with educators because they experienced racial discrimination as students years ago, because they emigrated from repressive regimes where asking questions or voicing opinions about public institutions was dangerous, or because they are not fluent in English. Educators, on the other hand, sometimes express a sense of being under siege and undervalued, expected to meet an impossible set of academic and social needs without adequate resources or supports. These experiences and perceptions contribute to the challenge of creating productive relationships across inside/outside lines.

Efforts to build inside/outside relationships also must take into account broader community contexts, including economic circumstances; the political sphere; and intergroup dynamics regarding race, class, language, and culture. Study participants emphasize, in particular, the importance of race in shaping relationships and roles in schools and in reform efforts. One national organization director explains, **"Race is part of who is seen as inside and outside. One of the problems is coming up against the tenet in the U.S. that black people are intellectually inferior. It's in the framework."** Jeffrey

Henig and colleagues conclude in *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education:*

> To be sure, the way in which race expresses itself has changed since desegregation defined local school politics. Often indirect, race may express itself in surprising ways. Nevertheless, race is a critical social and political variable that constrains both how internal elites interact with each other and how they deal with external actors.[1]

Inside/outside dynamics strongly affect efforts to shift and broaden who has power in decision-making about education. Power inequities are particularly stark between those working or having access to key players inside the school system and those outside it. Chapter 8 describes specific strategies that constituency builders use to shift power, including among insiders and outsiders.

Definitions of Insiders and Outsiders

Constituency builders use the terms "insider" and "outsider" in various ways. Some study participants use the terms to describe an individual's official position or status in an institution. For instance, Cross City Campaign defines insiders as people employed by the education system and outsiders as people not employed by it. While recognizing that people's behavior and interests are affected by factors other than employment status, the campaign finds this working definition useful in shaping cross-sector strategies and convening constituents with various relationships to public education.

Others use the terms in a more fluid way to denote power held, roles, or how people are perceived. In this analysis, inside/outside status is dependent less on a person's job and more on that individual's authority or influence over a decision. Individuals and organizations may play various roles over time or concurrently. **At any given point, a person can be seen as an insider by some and as an outsider by others.**

A person's status can change with the issue being addressed, the level of confrontation involved, or the relevant point of entry into the school bureaucracy. For instance, a parent might be accepted as part of the planning group for a new after-school program, but then find herself in an outsider role and excluded from decisions when she raises questions about the school's core curriculum. In other cases, parents move from outsider to insider roles. A challenge, then, is to retain independence from school bureaucracy and maintain relationships with other parents. One local trainer describes the risk of constituents gaining access to decision-making circles and then working to keep others out, so that they are the only ones with insider status and influence: "A principal will develop a little group of parents who maybe at one time were pretty strong adversaries, but they become part of the in group, and they become gatekeepers." The same participant notes that this dynamic is not unique to schools: "In my lifetime as an activist, I have been part of at least five efforts where the organizers became the strongest gatekeepers."

The status of other constituencies also depends on context and is seen differently by various parties. Although some constituency builders always see teachers as insiders due to their employment status or the power of teachers unions in some districts, others sometimes view teachers as outsiders, since individual teachers lack the authority to change school or district policy and are subject to many decisions themselves. Higher education institutions and local organizations may be seen as insiders when they provide support and assistance, but as outsiders when they overstep those roles. Much depends on the individual or group's relationships within the system and the community. In that respect, insider/outsider status reflects power inequities in society that are often based on factors such as race and class.

For many activists, changing perceptions about whose voice is legitimate is at the heart of constituency building. Constituents need to see their interests as legitimate and important in order to take public roles in reform. When policymakers and administrators view constituents as having legitimate interests in school decisions, they are more likely to listen to constituents' opinions and include them in decision-making. Study participants emphasize that, although "in reality, parents are almost always viewed as outsiders," parents' interests in and rights regarding public education *should* give them insider power and status.

Reasons To Bridge the Inside/Outside Divide in Education

Whether "outsiders" are defined as those not employed by the system or as those not having power in it, all study participants say that outside pressure is needed to achieve reform, particularly in terms of ensuring educational equity. Participants help constituents invoke their constitutional and statutory rights and use democratic processes to exert pressure on public school systems. However, most reformers see their role as not only helping outsiders exert pressure, but also building bridges between insiders and outsiders. Even study participants who work almost exclusively with outside constituencies in other areas where collaboration is not so important — such as water and sewer services, environmental issues, and banking — say education reform requires a different approach, one that entails building relationships and capacity for cooperation between insiders and outsiders. Local organization directors offer these analyses of why inside/outside work is necessary to education reform:

- **Constituents depend on cooperation to implement reform.** Even if constituents succeed in establishing a new policy, it might not be effectively implemented if educators are alienated and resistant. A study participant comments on an instance when reformers neglected to secure cooperation: "The political hammer wasn't bringing out the best in anybody. People were resisting it and hunkering down and resisting any conversation about what could be different, what could be better."

- **Constituents need to keep the focus on improving schools.** Public institutions, confronted with data about a problem, sometimes respond by attacking the data or deflecting attention. "They're responding to the public relations problem, not the underlying problem," observes a participant. By establishing relationships, constituents can raise problems in relatively nonthreatening ways that help move the conversation toward finding solutions.

- **Constituents seek to help preserve public education while improving it.** Activists struggle to strike this balance. "We don't want [schools] to be failures, we don't want them to be embarrassments, because that feeds into the hands of [those] who are trying to dismantle public everything, including public schools," says a participant. "It's such a delicate call about where you put pressure and ultimately what your design is, what your strategy is."

To some, inside/outside relationships are not just strategically necessary to achieve and sustain specific changes in schools; they are vital to building civic capacity and establishing school-community collaborations that meet the complex needs of children and families. For instance, researcher Clarence Stone argues that education is not merely formal schooling. Human capital development takes place in and out of schools and requires civic capacity in various sectors, "serious and sustained efforts to make collective investments in the human capital ... children represent."[2] Michele Cahill, in *Schools and Community Partnerships,* a Cross City Campaign working paper, identifies five types of school-community collaborations. Each type of collaboration requires strong, ongoing relationships between educators and community members and organizations:

- **Services collaborations** — programs in which community agencies provide health or other services in schools.

- **Educational partnerships** — collaborations in which community groups with strong ties to students' neighborhoods and cultures provide services, activities, or opportunities that boost students' motivation and affiliation with school.

- **Partnerships for youth development** — collaborations between community youth groups and schools that support children's creative, cognitive, social, and/or spiritual development, often emphasizing youth leadership.

- **Collaborations for community and economic development** — programs that use schools as resources for community development, such as by engaging students in housing or small business development or by opening school buildings to neighborhood groups.

- **Partnerships for new schools or new governance** — joint efforts to redesign schools and decision-making structures to shift control away from centralized bureaucracies to students, families, teachers, and community stakeholders.[3]

Janice Petrovich, Director of Education, Sexuality, Religion at the Ford Foundation, adds a sixth type of collaboration: **Public engagement partnerships** — collaborations in which community groups build knowledge on school reform options, promote public dialogue, and seek consensus on solutions.

Common Characteristics of Inside/Outside Work

Many of the values, strategies, and challenges of building on diversity, discussed in Chapter 6, apply to building relationships among inside and outside constituents. Study participants also emphasize the need to address perceptions of legitimacy and the distinct needs of inside and outside constituents.

Fostering a Sense of One's Own and Others' Legitimacy

Some constituency builders try to help individuals understand others' situations as well as their own, opening the possibility for members of various groups, such as parents and teachers, to work together. On one hand, for example, these efforts can help educators recognize "their own oppression" — as a study participant termed it — and their legitimacy in voicing the need for educational change. One local constituency builder says, "I approach teachers by saying, 'You're not getting the resources you need. Look at that school in that affluent area, at what they have.' " Such efforts also can teach constituents to recognize their own roles and capacities.

On the other hand, these efforts can help people not employed by the system, including parents, recognize the pressures educators face. Participants design forums that enable inside and outside constituents to identify common issues and see each other as allies. One participant comments, "There are human beings within that system. We have people listen across the board — teachers, parents, students — in meetings that parents organize and lead."

Such efforts take various forms. One participant describes transforming a traditional school event to build understanding and respect among teachers and parents. At T.A. Brown Elementary School in Austin, Texas, the principal, who is also education co-chair of Austin Interfaith, an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate, worked with a team of teachers and parents to develop a new format for Back to School Night. "The way it's always been done, Back to School Night is very bureaucratic, with teachers giving out information, telling about schedules and such. It's not relational," says the participant. About 15 teachers chose to try the new format, in which parents and the teacher sat in a circle and discussed their experiences in school. Teachers who tried the new format became advocates of it. In addition, the principal notes, "The parents who had that experience this year will expect it next year."

In Kentucky and Tennessee, Lincoln Memorial University's Center for Professional Collaboration requires student teachers to involve both their mentor teacher and parents in developing a curriculum unit. With support from the university, student teachers create an environment in which their mentor teachers come to view parents as legitimate partners in curriculum development. As a third party, the university is able to catalyze new relationships. A study participant says, "We might have a parent with a history of conflict with an administrator at a school. But once the parent develops a relationship with the university, they've bought in and feel they have developed a relationship with both institutions."

Participants say they must prepare for and facilitate forums that bring insider and outsider groups together, so all parties can respect each other's new roles. One local organizer recounts: "After one parent academy, a group of parents met with the principal regarding what all the data mean for the school. The organizer had to

> *"You have to feel you have any power before you can share that power. Constituent roles change when this can happen."*
>
> *— A local organizer and trainer*

coach the principal and had separate coachings for the parents. The coachings were important in order to have a productive discussion." The need for such coaching is ongoing. A constituency builder who works with various sites describes how easily a single group can perceive and assert that progress is due solely to their efforts, undermining any sense of mutual respect and derailing future collaboration. She tells of a project that matched Asian community-based organizations (CBOs) with schools that served their constituencies. The joint work helped produce significant improvements in services. However, when the school and CBO staff came together for a conference, teacher teams described the process without any reference to CBOs. "It disempowered the CBOs immediately, just like that," she says.

> *"Some of this work is about how to change perceptions about who cares about kids, who feels invested, who thinks education is important."*
>
> *— A local constituency builder*

Providing Differentiated Roles and Supports

Building capacity for collective action does not necessarily mean that all constituents play the same roles. Study participants value constituents' ability to apply pressure in various ways and bring various resources to reform. For instance, in Portland, Oregon, while the Portland Schools Foundation was working with the board of education and the superintendent to build broad consensus around a five-year strategic plan for the school system, some members of the minority community used confrontational tactics to hold the system accountable for implementing the plan and taking immediate steps to meet urgent needs. A newspaper account highlights the contrast to the collaborative planning process, describing how the protesters "shouted down discussion of the strategic plan many times, chanting 'No more promises!' and 'Save our kids!' About 150 of them, mainly African American parents, turned out to help take over the board meeting for more than an hour."[4] A constituency builder involved in the process explains the parents' strategy:

> The minority community said, 'We would rather take the tactics of protest and civil disobedience to raise the community's awareness about our children who still have been failing, and to put some power and fire in the belly behind the achievement gap strategies.' So they never said, 'The plan is bad.' They said, 'We don't believe the district has the political will unless pushed very hard from the outside to make anything happen or anything different. We have seen plans and consultants come to Portland in years gone by and still our children are at 30 percent to benchmark.'

The foundation welcomed the pressure. "[We] celebrated the fact that people care that much and that they are basically working in a different way and a more adversarial way towards the same ultimate goals that the strategic plan was leading toward," says a study participant.

Sometimes, participants arrange roles to enable constituents least susceptible to personal repercussions to take the most public role. For instance, one coordinator of a parent-principal coalition says, "We deliberately haven't completely formalized ourselves. Only the parents sign letters that are controversial." Parents take the lead publicly "because principals' jobs are at risk." Principals and parents develop positions together, the coordinator compiles arguments into a document, and coalition members use the arguments in various ways, depending on their roles and the situation.

Varying access to information and recognition of risks were the driving forces behind role distinctions in a coalition of parents and students, according to one study participant:

> The students had a different kind of role than the parents as they actually started working with the school, because the students are in the school — they're part of the school. The parents are not there every day. And so, for instance, some of the data collection around conditions in the bathroom, around facilities, around what was really happening around some of the intergroup rela-

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tions in the school — it was the students who were doing that data collection, because they were in there. When it was engaging with the teachers, a really interesting thing happened, because the students really pulled back. It was much more the parents engaging with the teachers as we started bringing them in, and I think it's related to the power relations and who recognizes that there are real repercussions for themselves if they speak out.

Participants emphasize the need for separate supports for various constituencies, particularly when there are differences in the roles they play or the power they hold. One local constituency builder describes a task force that includes parents, students, administrators, and other community members:

> Two of the reasons that I think it's been successful, that students have continued to organize in that school and be a part of that work are, one, that they have their own independent organizing work and supports for it that allow them to come to the table and leave the table and do work that's their work. ... [Two,] it takes a facilitator in those [joint] sessions. It takes a certain amount of sensitivity not to be condescending ... and facilitation that their role at that table will be respected.

Challenges of Inside/Outside Work

Balancing Access versus Independence

Many study participants combine strategies, applying pressure from outside the system while building capacity and developing collaborations inside. Participants describe this work as a delicate balance: "There's a price with inside/outside work. You have information and access, because you're not the enemy," but maintaining that access limits the available strategies.

Many participants use a variety of tactics on various levels. In some cases, constituents have developed collaborative relationships with state education officials or politicians and work with them to pressure school districts, or constituents work with similar figures at the district level to pressure particular schools. In other cases, collaborative relationships have been closer to the ground. One grassroots organizer says, "I haven't found a way to make heavy conflict work at a local school. It can work with the district. ... The district-level work is straight accountability work. We define our demands, organize the constituency, and do a campaign. The more ruckus we raise, the better chance we have of winning." She notes how each tactic affects relationships: "We're constantly concerned about how the local school personnel — administration and faculty — will view the actions we take at the district level."

Participants who partner with public institutions express wariness about being co-opted. One local organization director constantly assesses, "Are we getting too close to district leadership [or] are we independent?" Others describe the risk of outside constituents becoming caught up in personnel politics in schools. One local participant says, **"Having good relationships with teachers can sometimes be perceived by the principal as 'Are they going to use those parents against me?' Parents, in my experience, not always, but certainly sometimes, run the risk of being used as pawns in a family squabble."**

Producing Immediate Improvements while Moving toward Systemic Reform

In shaping their relationships with public institutions, study participants balance the need to accomplish short-term tasks with the need to build capacity for the institution to perform effectively in the long term. Opinions diverge as to whether an independent group ever should assume a function that the public institution should do itself but currently is not performing. In one local constituency builder's view, undertaking a discrete task, such as drafting a plan or designing a Web site, may be necessary when the school system lacks critical resources or faces crisis: "They really don't have the time, in a sense, to get everything done that needs to be done. Part of what we've done is just said, 'Okay, we'll do some of your work for you.' ... To me, it's part of what teaming and working at public education as a collaborative piece is about. ... Maybe it's a matter of not seeing it as *their* work." Others point to the risk of creating the perception that the relevant function is no longer the institution's responsibility. A state organization director would only consider taking on a task "to shame them into doing it or give them an example that hopefully is successful, one that they would pick up and do."

Charter schools are sometimes a flash point for the debate on appropriate roles for community groups. When a community group operates a charter school, it assumes the primary responsibility of this public institution — educating students. Some study participants see charters as diverting constituents' energy and scarce educational resources to provide perhaps better education for only a few students. Meanwhile, the regular public schools continue to serve most students and have less pressure to change, because some of the activist families have left them. Others see in charters a way for families and other community members to create the education they want their children to have and for educators to free themselves from bureaucratic restraints. After emphasizing that her goal is ensuring good education for all children, not just some, one local organizer sums up the dilemma for many parents: "Your kids are your kids. You don't have time for [an organizing group] to fix the school. You have to get them an education before they drop out."

Getting to Core Educational Issues

To address core issues of what is being taught and how, constituency builders often must help people overcome a sense that such concerns are the exclusive purview of professional educators. Parents sometimes raise issues such as school climate, discipline, special education, and transportation because they feel able to articulate goals and effect change in those areas. In contrast, parents and other community members sometimes feel at sea when trying to articulate specific academic goals. One local constituency builder describes an incremental approach to building parents' sense of legitimacy in raising teaching and learning issues:

> It's much easier to move first on an issue parents identify, such as the abandoned lot next to the school being filled with garbage, gangs recruiting their kids after school. The closer you can get to the school, the better. You have to win on something first. Then when you have the follow-up meeting, you talk about what people are doing in other places. You ask, 'Do you want to work on something like that?' You can bring up test scores.
>
> [C]lass size and overcrowding [is] a natural issue that parents identify as within their bailiwick. They can do something about it. They must do it. It's critical and they know how. But in a lot of teaching and learning stuff, like getting quality teachers into a school, parents know that they don't have quality teachers, they feel very strongly about it, but they don't feel that they have a voice on that kind of an issue.

Study participants note that students often raise teaching and learning issues more readily. A statewide organization director says:

> From high school students, [we hear] a lot about the classes being boring, around the kind of interactive stuff that they really want to have in their classes, about what engages them in learning, about the degree to which teachers either put them down or really encourage them. Those are the kinds of

> *"Students identify quality of instruction as a public issue immediately. It's an issue that they may not believe they know the solution to, and they may not always be ready to take the action that it takes to change, but they don't see it as a personal problem. They see it as a political issue. Parents are much more likely, especially early on, to see teaching and learning issues as personal problems."*
>
> *— A local organizer*

issues that high schoolers bring up that don't always come from parents.

As families and other community members become increasingly involved in teaching and learning issues, they run a greater risk of being perceived as a threat and having doors closed in their faces. One local constituency builder describes the progression:

> If you have a parent action around facilities that ends up with getting 300 light bulbs replaced in the school that were out, people inside the schools will applaud. Move and develop to the next level where you've gotten past the light bulbs and the facility to issues of teaching and learning, and it can get pretty difficult.

Another participant sums up the problem: "When parents cross over into teaching and learning issues, it is war." Teaching and learning issues are sensitive because they most raise the question of who has power in schools and who makes the decisions that most affect students' lives.

The culture of a particular school, district, and community contributes to educators' attitudes toward parents and other community members. Also, professional norms influence teachers' expectations of control and power in their classrooms and principals' expectations of authority in their schools. Most teachers are used to having what they do in their classrooms be their business, within ethical bounds. Many educators feel threatened not only when families raise teaching and learning issues, but also when discussing these issues with other educators.

In developing inside/outside relationships, participants seek to affirm that *all* constituents have a legitimate interest in classroom practice and to help constituents raise educational issues without triggering alarm. Some constituency builders use the current interest in academic standards as an entrance into sensitive discussions and decisions about teaching content and methods. Standards for what students should know and be able to do have become a major focus of education policy in recent decades, and some study participants see standards as the main tool for reform, partly because they articulate for all stakeholders clear expectations of school outcomes.

The Philadelphia Education Fund used standards as a lens through which parents, high school teachers, and higher education faculty examined their expectations of students and schools. Teams of teachers, parents, and postsecondary faculty wrote standards for academic content and student performance and developed curriculum units and assessments based on them. Comparing actual student work to the standards, teams engaged in detailed, practical discussions about student assignments and expectations, as well as implications for broader changes. By introducing the concept of standards and their relationship to student work, the teams also laid the foundation for developing standards later adopted formally by the Philadelphia School District. Many of the parents, educators, and community members on the initial teams later served on the district's standards-writing teams, which also were organized and supported by the Philadelphia Education Fund.[5]

"Many educators do not discuss their practice. They work in isolation, often in schools that don't value collaboration. If the educators don't talk with each other, then they are even less prepared to talk with parents about teaching and learning issues, which they feel are their area of expertise."

— A local constituency builder

Protecting Constituents from Repercussions

Constituency builders see part of their role as protecting constituents, as much as possible, from potential negative consequences of challenging power structures. As one local constituency builder puts it, "You can't have kids getting swatted at, because the adults

say 'Rah, rah, we want you to be revolutionaries,' and then abdicate the responsibility. ... I know how people come after them, and somebody's got to be there to deal with those issues."

Who is at risk depends partly on the level of power being challenged. When school leadership is targeted, for example, staff and students are most at risk. One local constituency builder and parent sees the costs that result when teachers feel threatened: "My kids have suffered because I'm doing this work." When district leadership is challenged, principals are particularly at risk of being transferred or assigned to office jobs. One local constituency builder recalls a misunderstanding that had long-term consequences for a coalition of principals and parents:

> The hardest time was when the superintendent called every school administrator who had come to a [coalition] meeting and chastised them. [The coalition] had invited the superintendent to a meeting. She had just fired custodians, and the press found out that she'd be at the meeting and was waiting outside. She thought that [the coalition] had set her up. She felt threatened. It made principals afraid to come to meetings. [We] met with her. It took a long time for [the coalition] to recover.

Participants try to prevent such repercussions partly by building relationships among groups and differentiating roles to protect those most at risk. Many reformers also try to prepare constituents for negative reactions by having them enact role-plays and think through effective responses. These activists emphasize the importance of remaining in public roles, despite the fact that constituents who feel attacked sometimes are inclined to make the conflict personal. For example, one youth organizing group trains students to respond to teacher or administrator complaints by offering to meet with the person as a group, shifting the dialogue back into the public sphere.

These challenges — of balancing access and independence in relationships with school systems, of changing perceptions of whose voice is legitimate in discussing teaching and learning issues, and of protecting constituents as they take action — continually confront constituency builders as they strive to change inside/outside power dynamics and, in doing so, improve schools.

[1] Henig, Jeffrey, et al., *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 277.

[2] Stone, Clarence N., et al., *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001, p. 4.

[3] Cahill, Michele, *Schools and Community Partnerships: Reforming Schools, Revitalizing Communities*, Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 1996.

[4] Hammon, Betsy, "Schools plan adopted after protest erupts," *The Oregonian*, June 27, 2000, p. B2.

[5] This work was part of a multisite demonstration project with the Education Trust of the American Association for Higher Education. Philadelphia's effort — called the Community Compact for College Access and Success — entailed collaboration to increase college readiness, enrollment, and retention in four North Philadelphia high schools.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Shifting Power

Constituency builders seek to shift power to a broader array of stakeholders and change how power is exercised. Study participants help parents, teachers, and others assert the needs and rights of all children to quality education, hold the system accountable for meeting those needs, and participate in decision-making about how to meet them. Chapter 3 discusses the importance of these changes and how they contribute to school reform. This chapter examines specific strategies study participants use to help constituents gain power and promote excellence and equity in public education. The strategies range from those focused on interpersonal dynamics, most often at the school level, to those emphasizing changes in governance policies, usually at the district or state level. These strategies include:

- forging relationships among groups to encourage educators to share decision-making and relate to parents and others in new ways (Chapters 6 and 7 describe general approaches to building relationships, and the first two sections of this chapter explore more specific strategies);
- working specifically with individual school or system leaders, such as principals, to enhance their willingness and capacity for shared decision-making;
- broadening constituents' power base by involving more stakeholders and working in coalitions;
- invoking constituents' constitutional and legislative rights, including the rights to free speech, free assembly, due process, and access to the courts; and
- establishing new governance policies that give constituents a seat at the table and a vote on key issues, along with training and support to help them to assume new roles.

Constituency-building organizations select strategies based on their missions and priorities. For instance, some groups build relationships and capacity across populations so all stakeholders can formulate and pursue shared goals, while others support particular populations in asserting their children's right to quality, equitable education. Strategy decisions also are influenced by the complex context of the work. Study participants help constituents analyze power dynamics in schools and communities, which are affected by diversity factors as well as inside/outside dynamics. Race, immigrant status, income, educational level, and political status and connections are just a few of the factors that contribute to discrepancies in power and opportunities in society, and all come to bear on public schools. Study participants underscore the complexity of these dynamics. Even within groups, there are multiple levels of power. For example, teachers who have seniority and strong relationships with administrators generally exercise more influence in schools than their coworkers.

Depending on these factors, participants' strategies vary greatly in terms of point of entry, relative emphasis on relationships among groups, and degree of collaboration or confrontation with the school system. However, all their strategies share three elements:

- **Permanent, independent constituency-building organizations.** Such organizations are critical to ensuring that changes in power dynamics and relationships occur among *constituent groups*, not just among particular *individuals*. Organizations keep the focus on enabling all constituents, not just a few, to have input in decisions. This feat is accomplished by involving large numbers of constituents, conducting ongoing recruitment, building strong relationships and collective capacity among constituents, and facilitating inclusive decision-making processes and smooth leadership transitions. Organizations provide ongoing

support for constituents in new roles and help them respond to new challenges.

- **Systemic goals.** All study participants seek to change power dynamics throughout the public education system. Some strategies start with building relationships within a single school; with seeking policies that require shared decision-making.

- **Use of data.** Participants train and support constituents in collecting and analyzing the many forms of data that are essential for full involvement in decision-making. Information is integral to building capacity for systemic work, analyzing power structures, and making compelling arguments, whether in meetings, before legislative bodies, or in courts of law.

Building Relationships for Shared Power

Study participants seek shared power and decision-making at all levels of the education system. This section focuses largely on efforts at the school level and on interactions between inside and outside constituents. Parents and other community members often enter into reform work at the school level and encounter assumptions there that limit their roles. After achieving some changes at the school level — activities that usually involve developing leadership skills and identifying systemic issues — constituents sometimes tackle district policies and practices. Often constituents use the same approaches to build relationships at the district and other levels. Clarence Stone and colleagues affirm the importance of changing relationships to achieve and sustain reform:

> To look at urban school reform in this way is to go beyond such things as pedagogical innovations at the school level, new management practices, or the addition of intensified professional development for teachers. It is to ask whether or not basically different relationships are put in place. For reform to be fundamental, mobilization has to be sustained and has to institutionalize new practices and relationships.[1]

One of the biggest challenges cited by study participants is transforming schools that have a culture of isolation, even among teachers, and power concentrated in the hands of a few. In such schools, the authority structure excludes other voices. Educators, parents, and others have become so accustomed to playing narrowly defined roles and having little communication with each other that shared decision-making is almost impossible to envision, never mind implement. In participants' experiences, these schools tend to have the least creative learning environments and the worst student outcomes, and thus are most in need of change.

Beginning with Shared Issues

Study participants often initiate relationships by proposing joint work on "neutral" issues that offer a common interest everyone recognizes from the start. In working together, parents and other community members can demonstrate their capacity to assume important responsibilities and perform key tasks.

When an organization works in multiple arenas — such as housing, health care, and education — it can build relationships with educators by taking action on an issue only tangentially related to education, then moving gradually closer to classroom issues. For example, Chicago ACORN has found that signing children up for free health insurance is an effective way to begin working with educators, because it is valued by parents

> *"[P]rofound parent involvement means sharing leadership — and that means sharing knowledge, responsibility, and most difficult of all, power. My experiences in Philadelphia have taught me that this is anything but simple."*
>
> *— Rochelle Nichols Solomon*
> *a study participant from the Philadelphia Education Fund*
> *writing in* Phi Delta Kappan[2]

and board of education members and boosts school morale. "But then we do something that automatically challenges who the principal thinks parents are. ... It immediately transforms relationships," says a study participant. Parents in one school asked the principal about teacher vacancies and took on recruitment tasks, "and that knocks people flat to think that parents would be running ads and doing interviews to recruit teachers for the school. But the principals are so desperate for teachers that they are not saying, 'No, I don't need any,' or 'Stay the hell out of my business.'" The progression affects parents' views of their roles, as well as principals' and teachers' perspectives. Educators see that parents can be effective and sometimes have more freedom to act as advocates than district employees do. Recognition of parents' capacity and effectiveness often increases educators' willingness to share decision-making.

Initial issues need not be external to schools. The Senior High Alliance of Principals, Presidents, and Educators, a parent-principal coalition in Washington, D.C., began with efforts to promote school safety. "Everyone feels the same about safety and facilities, and principals really need parents to fight on those issues," a study participant points out. As principals see parents making a difference by fighting for better policies and resources, many administrators become increasingly willing to collaborate with parents and share decision-making on a variety of issues.

Establishing a Mechanism for Discussion

Many schools lack not only democratic decision-making structures, but even forums for educators and parents to discuss schools' goals and educational programs. Study participants have created various tools to facilitate such communication, and they use those tools to initiate relationships that can open the door to more shared decision-making. For example, the Philadelphia Education Fund has structured discussions about standards. Kentucky's Prichard Committee has developed a format called Parents and Teachers Talking Together, which gathers parents and teachers from a school and poses two initial questions: "What do we want for our students?" and "What do we need to get what we want for our students?" Parents and teachers are divided into separate groups to answer the questions, then come together to compare lists and prioritize. Often, the two groups are surprised to find they have similar priorities. When opinions diverge, differences are not necessarily determined by who is a teacher and who is a parent. The discussion helps teachers and parents move beyond stereotypes that interfere with productive relationships, develop a sense of common purpose and mutual respect, and improve their communication with each other. Thus, the discussion improves parents' and educators' capacity to work jointly to develop state-mandated school plans and to share decision-making on school councils, which are required by state law to include the principal, teachers, and parents from each school.

Study participants often draw on local data or other research to stimulate discussion and expand people's views of parents' roles in education. Participants note that research tends to land mostly on the desks of central administration, and some activists work to distribute research findings more broadly to principals, teachers, and parents. Especially useful is research that gets educators thinking in new ways about parent and community engagement, raises provocative issues relating to equity, or describes in detail specific reform efforts and educational models. Participants emphasize the need for facilitated forums that help people analyze data and examine how that information can be used to drive improvements in their schools.

Participants also use regional and national forums away from constituents' school or district as "safe places" to open dialogues and enable parents, students, and others to demonstrate leadership roles (for more information, see Chapter 9).

Having Outsiders Bring a Resource

One way to help educators see the value of working with parents and community members is to have them offer specific resources. In Philadelphia, the Alliance Organizing Project gave $5,000 minigrants to parent-led teams to conduct reading projects in partnership with schools. To get a minigrant, parents and teachers had to conduct "listening campaigns," surveying their colleagues and fellow parents. In addition, teachers, parents, and the principal of the relevant school had to sign off on the project plan. Even such small grants provided effective incentives for schools to work with parents and

helped educators recognize that parents could play new roles. Their shared authority over the reading projects modeled the power sharing that parents wanted to move toward more broadly. In some cases, parents already had initiated relationships with schools around safety or other issues, and the minigrants enabled the parents to raise teaching and learning issues.

Shaping District Policies To Support Relationships

District policies greatly affect the ease or difficulty of building relationships and changing roles. Principal assignment and accountability and school governance are a few of the important policy areas and are discussed later in this chapter. Others include, for example, school size, which is a major factor in determining whether students, parents, and educators feel connected to each other, can communicate effectively, and can develop collective capacity for action. In a large school, holding discussions, even just among faculty, can be difficult. Constituency builders help teachers, parents, and others identify policy changes that will facilitate positive relationships and shared decision-making.

Relating to the Powers That Be: Principals as One Example

Constituency builders work with or around principals in ways that provide useful case studies for changing power dynamics. Many of the approaches described in the previous section, in fact, are used to build relationships with principals as well as other educators. However, principals unwilling or unaccustomed to sharing power can introduce additional challenges. Principals have a great deal of power at the school level. In most districts, they have legal authority over most key decisions at the school, from budgeting to professional development decisions. A productive relationship with a principal can enable constituents to share in those decisions and easily forge relationships with other educators in the school. Such connections also can affect district-level work. **Many study participants use schools as a base for systemic work, building strong constituencies at individual schools, then bringing those constituencies together to work for district-level, or even state-level, reforms. Because principals have relationships and influence beyond their own schools, constituents' relationships with principals can affect how they are viewed by others in the school district.**

Principal Power and Role

School reform literature frequently stresses the importance of strong principals, and most study participants affirm this point of view. One local organizer notes that, beyond official roles and responsibilities, principals "end up having a kind of power that people cede to them in the school. People just assume that the principal has the authority to do certain things whether they do or don't." The same participant sums up what she wants to see in a principal:

> You need the principal to help organize a consistent, unified vision about what we're doing and hold the course to that. ... The good principals know how to get rid of staff who aren't on the plan, who aren't on program, and they know how to energize the staff who are. They know how to create a space for staff to develop a plan around their own professional development, so they feel like it's their plan. And they know how to bring teachers and community and parents together rather than use their power to keep them divided.

To help connect teachers and parents, a principal can create mechanisms and supports that enable parents and other community members to be on campus and allow school staff to venture into the community. On a nitty-gritty level, principals control access to meeting space and, to a large extent, staff and students.

Principals demonstrate their commitment to equity on many levels, from setting standards for acceptable faculty behavior to promoting high expectations for all students and ensuring that services are available to help students meet those expectations. One study participant says that principals must "align the task of the school to the concerns of the community. ... And that [requires] a real willingness to say, 'This school really is about access and equity for our students; this school really is about giving this community what it needs.'"

Some constituency builders see the principal as struggling to reconcile the often divergent expectations and needs of teachers, district leaders, parents, and

> *"We don't select schools based on the principal. ... We've learned that there are surprises ... principals change either way."*
>
> *— The director of a statewide group*

community members regarding not only equity but all educational issues. The strength of the principal's relationship with each party shapes the way the principal exercises power. Study participants recount instances when a principal's relationship with teachers determined his or her willingness to make changes. In one case, an initially obstructive principal became supportive when his teachers, with whom he had a strong relationship, indicated they wanted changes. Likewise, a principal who initially had supported an effort balked when some of his most prized teachers objected to the changes, which would have entailed their participation in training, openness to new teaching methods, and reallocation of resources. "He was not willing to in any way shake up or take on his veteran teachers," says a study participant.

A principal's relationship with teachers also affects teachers' attitudes toward other parties. One local organizer describes a school where teachers were so angry with the principal that they virtually refused to do anything, whether the principal was involved or not. The history of strife, which included racial issues, prevented progress, and the community group working with the school concluded that dynamics would not change until the principal departed.

Strategic Responses to Principal Power

Constituency builders face a problem: They want a strong and welcoming educational leader, but often, particularly in low-performing schools, they do not have one. Study participants respond to this problem differently. For some, a willing principal is a necessary criterion for working with a school. Faced with schools without willing principals, many constituency builders begin work in *other* schools, with the long-term strategy of building enough support to institute district-level changes affecting all of the schools, including schools with resistant principals. Chicago ACORN tests a principal's willingness to work with parents by asking for basic information, such as a list of students, in the context of a neutral campaign, and works only in schools with cooperative principals. One participant who works with inside and outside constituencies distinguishes between weak and obstructive principals, noting that she can work with the former but not the latter.

In contrast, constituency builders at California Tomorrow (CT) do not base site selection on the principal's initial attitude because they have seen principals shift from support to opposition and vice versa. "It depends on the kind of change that the community is trying to make happen and what it sparks in that particular principal," says a study participant. CT's work in Salinas, California, described in Chapter 3, is part of an effort to develop models for increasing equity without leadership, or even support, from principals. In contrast to the strategy of starting with shared issues to form relationships with people in authority, this approach starts with people committed to equity — whether they are principals, teachers, counselors, parents, students, or other community members — and helps them build power for change, first at the school level, and then the district level. In Salinas, CT formed and supported the Working Group on Race, Language, and Culture that enabled 20 committed teachers to examine and advocate instructional strategies designed to overcome barriers of race, language, and

> *"If you don't have a principal who has that willingness to do the kinds of things that allow you all as organizers to be successful, then in our experiences it does not work."*
>
> *— The director of a local organizing group*

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cultural differences. The group's discussions and research resulted in an accelerated literacy approach for immigrant students and English language learners, which was implemented by 10 of the teachers. In addition, the group used newsletters and workshops to expand support for equitable reform among other teachers and community members. Although similar strategies in other districts eventually led to working relationships with principals, this did not happen in Salinas. However, the group's effort was sustained by increasingly broad support in the school, at the district level, and in the community.

Some study participants describe cases where constituents felt they could not work with or around the principal and sought a replacement. However, all participants agree, as one put it, "If you shoot for the principal, you'd better not miss." Moreover, even if constituents succeed in ousting an obstructive principal, there is no guarantee that the successor will be better.

Since an inclusive principal is certainly an asset and, some say, a necessity, many participants seek to expand principals' views of parent and community involvement and build principals' capacity to share decision-making with constituents. Strategies that start with shared issues and constituent resources, described above, aim to create new relationships and roles in school settings. Constituency builders also seek to expand principals' perspectives by linking them with others in alternate settings. Such venues include:

- **Peer networks.** The Interfaith Education Fund brings together the 17 Austin, Texas, principals involved in the Alliance Schools Project. They meet monthly, hold each other accountable for progress, ask each other hard questions, and, where needed, provide on-site assistance at each others' schools. The network principals even decided, with organizers, to "let a school go" from the project when the principal demonstrated a lack of commitment, according to a study participant.

- **Cross-sector meetings.** Cross City Campaign organizes study trips and working meetings where principals, district personnel, parents, and community members investigate important issues, such as school-based budgeting and high school reform. These forums legitimize the voices of parents, students, and others and provide opportunities for principals to interact with other educational leaders who might be more accustomed to sharing power.

District policies heavily influence principals' attitudes toward parents and other constituents. Constituency builders help constituents in analyzing how these policies affect principals and, sometimes, in advocating for policy changes. Study participants highlight policies that address:

- **Hiring and firing.** If school governance councils that include parents, such as Chicago's local school councils, have authority to select principals, then educators have a strong incentive to work with at least some parents.

- **Assignment and longevity.** In the view of one local constituency builder, principal turnover and instability can make it almost impossible to work with a school. Ironically, turnover often results from efforts to move effective leaders up the ladder. Retirements also spur turnover. Study participants point to the need for thoughtful assignment policies that provide incentives for principals and teachers to stay and that facilitate orderly transitions. On the other hand, districts must consider the risk of long-term placements that can lead to stagnation and fiefdoms.

- **Accountability.** Principal accountability and compensation policies also affect principals' attitudes toward parents and others. In one city, the emphasis on test results in the district defines, for some principals, the role of parents — " 'Get your kid here and get them fed' kinds of things," in the words of one study participant. The same district has implemented performance-based principal evaluations, but reportedly with unclear and unevenly applied criteria, and has limited the amount of time for which principals can be paid for additional tasks, such as supervising extracurricular activities. As a result, many principals are angry and feel they are not being fairly evaluated or compensated. As that sense of unfairness seeps

"The day-to-day, the nitty gritty, the roll-up-your-sleeves, deeply involved — you do not need 100 people doing that. But there are those moments ... that you have to demonstrate the power, and that is the organized people."

— A local constituency builder

into other areas, principals might be likely to perceive district support and resources for parent involvement as a threat rather than an incentive.

Broadening the Power Base through Coalitions

The number and composition of constituents are major factors in determining how effectively a group can press for change and demand a greater role in decision-making. Study participants wrestle with the question of what constitutes critical mass or, as a participant working in multiple sites defines it, "who and how many people it will take to move the body that controls what they seek to change." When the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation sought higher taxes to benefit education, it needed approval from a majority of voters from across the countywide district. On the other hand, a small number of constituents might be able to pilot curricular changes or lobby for a policy, such as a capital development plan. A local participant commented, "The mayor and the board of education think they're flooded if they get 10 calls."

Coalitions enable constituents to develop new relationships, expand their sphere of influence, and broaden the base for collective action. They are particularly common at the district, state, and federal levels in policy campaigns, but study participants also have built coalitions for grassroots change. Constituency builders see coalitions as serving various purposes, and their memberships and structures vary accordingly. Some constituency builders believe that reform requires coalitions across all stakeholder groups. Others focus on helping inequitably served families assert their needs; they form alliances with other poorly served groups and try to facilitate coalitions to help those constituents make their voices heard and pressure the system.

Study participants say they face many challenges in forming and maintaining coalitions in a diverse, fragmented society that stresses individualism over joint action. As discussed in Chapter 6, differences in race, as well as class and other characteristics, can make forming relationships and alliances more difficult. Study participants' experiences demonstrate that overcoming these challenges is possible, but highly labor intensive. For example, since 1983, the Prichard Committee's work to bring together Kentucky parents, educators, businesses, politicians, and the media has been essential both to achieving comprehensive state reform legislation and to translating that policy into school-level change and improved student outcomes. Moreover, independent constituency-building groups have been able to help communities overcome racial divides to pursue educational equity. Following the 1992 riots in the Watts/South Central communities of Los Angeles, the MultiCultural Collaborative, California Tomorrow, and the Achievement Council provided leadership development, reform information, and facilitation services to Latino and African American families. From the start, the organizations had one bottom line: They would not tolerate any movement that would hurt a community. It all had to be in the shared interest of all — African American and Latino, immigrant and native born. Their work resulted in the formation of Parents and Students Organized, an interethnic parent and student group seeking equitable reform.

Articulating an Agenda for Positive Change

Study participants note that alliances are most easily formed when groups are mobilizing against something; it is much harder to build and maintain an alliance with a positive agenda. To overcome this challenge, some participants focus on a specific issue and ally largely with people having strong personal interests in the issue. For example, the Intercultural Development and Research Association works with parents to forge

alliances with bilingual education teachers regarding bilingual education in Texas. The particular coalition often is not the sum of the organization's work, but rather serves as part of a larger strategy that reaches beyond any particular issue.

Building coalitions for comprehensive systemic reform is particularly challenging. Participants point to the challenge of formulating a common vision that not only is broad enough for various stakeholders to buy into and specific enough for action, but that reaches beyond students, parents, and educators to draw in businesses, community groups, and others. While noting that accountability and closing the achievement gap appeal to many sectors, one local constituency builder describes the difficulty of reconciling different notions of what change is needed:

> It is really hard work because the business community and the political leaders are more prone to [endorse] the accountability framework and the testing. They are more comfortable with a framework that is simple and clear. Teacher leaders, the union, parent leaders, site council members, and other community players who work in schools with kids everyday see things a little bit less crisply and maybe 'the devil is in the details,' in terms of opportunity to learn and professional development and instructional coaches in school. So, not everyone is on the same page.

Study participants offer this advice on forming broad alliances:

- Frame school reform efforts to underscore the impact on the community as a whole, so even those not directly involved see themselves as beneficiaries. For example, one participant describes the use of economic and civil society arguments, citing the state's high poverty, high unemployment, low job creation, and low voter turnout rates to make the case for investments in education reform.

- Relate each specific school reform goal to larger community goals. A national organization director describes the challenge: "The nature of the dialogue that takes place is so specific that it pushes people who are not intimately involved with it out of it."

- Use an inclusive reform process and address long-standing inequities that have alienated populations poorly served by schools. For example, immigrant, racial minority, and low-income communities in some cities have weathered waves of "school improvement" that have failed to diminish, and in some cases have exacerbated, the achievement gap. The same director states, "Most of our organizing that we have done in the past hasn't gotten past this sort of racial point or class point. There have been these splinter groups that have pulled out because they are not assured that the system is going to work for them."

Discussants agree that an outside group, such as a local education fund or a citizens group, generally is better able to engage the public in reform than school district personnel. District leaders, particularly in those districts most in need of reform, often lack credibility in the community. **Whereas the district often is seen as self-interested, an outside group can be seen as community- and child-interested.**

Keeping a Coalition Together through Implementation

As a vision or policy is implemented, more and more detailed decisions must be made, and each decision has the potential to fracture the coalition. A state organization director notes, **"One of the jobs of keeping the coalition together is that somebody has to be thinking about how to set the agenda, meaning what gets pushed to the front burner and what doesn't, and … control the pace."**

Part of that task is steering clear of divisive issues that are not critical to the coalition's core mission. Groups strive to keep such issues from fracturing the coalition and diverting attention from more essential matters. For critical issues, participants use their initial platform or policy as the reference point for making decisions. However, each decision can affect various stakeholders, and taking a position might entail — or be perceived as — choosing a side. The cost is cumulative; the same state director says, "every time you do that, it gets a little worse." A local coalition organizer recommends defining the coalition's initial goals in a flexible way, to allow for adjustment for unforeseen factors that are bound to arise. The degree to which the initial process is inclusive can affect these later negotiations. If everyone involved feels

ownership and stakeholders enjoy positive relationships with each other, then there is a relatively good chance of working out details and making adjustments.

Study participants emphasize the importance of ongoing public pressure to overcome obstacles to reform. A state organization director notes that part of keeping the public on board is maintaining focus on the relationship between reform and broader economic and civic issues: **"It is important all the time to keep reminding people why you are doing all this ... and constantly repaint the picture. ... People have very short memories, and they are not very well informed."** Groups also must show that reform efforts are producing results. One local organization director speaks of possible ramifications within a decade: "If we don't address some of those systemic barriers to building the kind of urban schools we want for our kids, I don't know if we'll be able to stand here and marshal up the kind of support that we have been able to marshal up for our schools."

Bringing and Keeping Politicians and Businesses on Board

While most study participants view their primary constituents as parents, educators, or both, many help constituents boost their power by forming alliances with other groups, including politicians and businesses.

Constituency builders help engage politicians in discussions and convince them to take leadership roles in reform. Who reformers reach out to is defined by political context. In one city, local political leaders are seen as essential, as are business leaders, both in lobbying for adequate funding from the state and in forcing systemic change at central office. "The mayor becomes important in being another catalyst for not morphing back into the old bureaucratic inertia," says a study participant. In another case, a constituent group has allied with state officials, who are leading the reform effort and exerting pressure on districts for reform.

Constituents engage politicians partly through public events, such as rallies and demonstrations. These events bring education into the public domain and shine a spotlight not only on the issue, but also on the attending official, thus pressuring the official to commit to further reform. Another strategy for engaging politicians is for constituents to provide briefings for candidates and hold community forums during election periods to form relationships with and secure commitments from candidates. One state group director emphasizes the role of the media, as well: "We speak to legislators a lot in public by making comments in the press and especially by talking to editorial writers, getting them to push legislators in certain ways."

Relationships with businesses also figure prominently in efforts to obtain support from politicians. Particularly when attempting to shape state policy, effective advocacy demands not only a broad understanding of systemic issues, but also a huge time investment to stay up to speed on amendments and other relevant political developments. Few parents or others at the ground level can make that investment, and most constituency-building groups do not have large staffs. Some study participants rely partly on business allies whose lobbyists carry their messages. These allies might include chambers of commerce, large corporations, teachers associations, and civic associations. (The Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative did not fund lobbying.)

Business involvement also can bring resources in terms of both funds and volunteer time. For example, in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, businesses not only helped fund broad dissemination of community visioning materials, but also encouraged employees to participate in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Fund's education summit. In Portland, Oregon, business representatives have served on planning committees and contributed expertise regarding administrative aspects of running large organizations.

Participants use various strategies for bringing and keeping business on board:

- Identify business leaders who will use their networks of relationships to recruit others.
- Involve the local or state chamber of commerce, which provides an institutional base and legitimacy in the business community.
- Build local alliances with local businesspeople.
- Organize visits to schools to break down stereotypes and humanize issues.

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- Shape appeals around issues that have resonance and parallels in the business community. For instance, the Portland Public Schools Foundation has obtained financial and labor investments from businesses for leadership and capacity development with principals. The need for strong leadership in schools is consistent with the business perspective on how successful organizations function.

In Kentucky, constituency builders encouraged business involvement by helping to create the Partnership for Kentucky School Reform. Following enactment of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), the Prichard Committee collaborated with The Business Roundtable and chief executive officers of UPS, Humana, and Ashland Oil to form the Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, a coalition of more than 50 business, government, education, labor, and media leaders, including the publishers of the state's two most prominent newspapers. Members made 10-year pledges to work together to help implement KERA. The partnership uses advertising and other public information strategies to increase public understanding and involvement in reform. UPS, Humana, and Ashland Oil have provided $1.5 million for a campaign that has included 500,000 newspaper inserts, television and radio advertising reaching 97 percent of Kentuckians, mailings, legislative briefings, and a special KERA "school bus" that has traveled the state distributing information. The partnership's Business Initiative has encouraged and assisted businesses in developing KERA awareness programs and other education initiatives.

Study participants report a recent shift away from business engagement in public education, as many corporations instead direct philanthropic dollars toward corporate identity efforts, such as funding for arts or sporting events. One participant attributes the shift partly to changes in business leadership:

> You have got a new generation of leaders. In my view they are not as civicly engaged as the older generation. You have got more of a bottom-line mentality, kind of stock market analysis driving decisions. So, they are pulling out of all kinds of stuff, everything, not just education. ... One of the generational changes is it is more likely that these people went to private schools and have children in private schools.

A local organizer says the shift also stems from disillusionment with the results of past efforts, as businesses appear to feel "a weariness of the problems of public education. Kind of like, 'been there, done that. We tried to fix those and they were not fixable, so we want to pull out.' Feeling like it was a bad investment. Folks here talk about throwing good money after bad and so are gun shy ... that it is just too political, too difficult to get around and make some progress."

Asserting Individual Rights

Constitutional and legislative rights represent significant tools for constituents demanding change. Constituents invoke federal constitutional rights, including the rights to free speech, free assembly, due process, equal protection, and access to the courts; state constitutional rights, most notably the right in many states to "adequate" education; and legislative rights, such as parents' rights to participate in decision-making about certain programs. These rights enable constituents to influence decisions and force specific changes. Such strategies are generally more confrontational than those described earlier in the chapter and include:

- **Large demonstrations in which groups show broad support for change and demand action from those in authority.** For example, in 1997, The Metropolitan Organization of Houston, Texas, an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate, held several "accountability sessions" with city council members and candidates. In each session, between 165 and 1,000 people demanded after-school programs and secured public commitments of support.

- **High-profile publications that increase understanding, bring public attention to issues, and intensify pressure on the system.** These reports often draw on data obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests. In 1998, the National Coalition of Advocates for Students published *A Gathering Storm: How Palm Beach County Schools Fail Poor and Minority Children*, based on data collected by the school district and submitted to

78

the Florida Department of Education. The report raised awareness of tracking and related issues and contributed to the formation of CARE, a community group tackling the issues.

- **Law suits that assert educational rights and force changes in policy and practice.** The *Rose v. Council for Better Education* litigation in Kentucky was a key factor in bringing about passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

- **Administrative complaints that force compliance with the law.** Immigrant parents in Florida have filed many complaints with the Florida Department of Education charging school districts with failing to comply with the state's language rights consent decree and with the districts' own limited English proficiency education plans.

Constituency-building groups use these strategies most often at the school district, state, and federal levels, partly because these tools are especially suited to changing policies and practices systemwide. In addition, many groups have found it most effective, given the nature of inside/outside dynamics, to use relationship-oriented methods to bring about school-level change.

Constituents often invoke their individual rights when addressing inequities based in longstanding power dynamics or distribution of resources. These inequities often are rooted in historical events, policies, and traditional behaviors reaching far beyond the education system, for instance to slavery, immigration policy, industrial developments, and class dynamics. Some study participants have found it difficult to build cross-group relationships and broad support on an agenda of remedying such deeply rooted inequities. However, it is important to note that equity agendas are not always addressed with legal strategies, nor has the use of such strategies been limited to remedying inequities.

Administrative complaints and litigation, in particular, usually aim to assert a minority's rights. Education's history in the United States shows the importance of litigation and other confrontational methods in demanding quality, equitable education for African American students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency, to name just a few groups. This report deals little with the role of lawsuits in shaping education; the focus here is on constituency building. Moreover, the Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative, whose grantees form the core of this study's participants, does not fund litigation. **However, reform groups sometimes use a combination of strategies, including filing lawsuits, drawing from multiple funding sources.** Litigation, particularly high-profile litigation, can not only achieve legal changes, but also further constituency building by:

- **Enhancing constituents' sense of legitimacy.** In explaining why they chose particular sites for constituency building, some study participants note the importance of previous litigation that helped create a history of collective interest.

- **Providing discovery mechanisms for obtaining information, a public forum for presenting data and expert analysis, and a media attraction.** All these outcomes can further efforts to educate the public. In New York, for instance, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity has conducted an extensive public education and engagement campaign along with its challenge to the state's education funding system.

Moreover, as demonstrated in Kentucky and elsewhere, effective implementation of court orders requires ongoing constituency building.[3]

A reform group's sheer ability to use confrontational strategies can give it leverage as it pursues relationships with those in authority in education. The possibility of a demonstration or a lawsuit can provide an incentive for district or state leaders to listen to constituent concerns and work on collaborative solutions.

Establishing New Governance Policies

Constituency builders seek to institutionalize new roles and power dynamics through policies and structures that require or support inclusive decision-making. These policies can be a goal of relationship building and other strategies discussed above, as well as a major factor in creating opportunities for furthering relationships and exercising power.

A local organizer describes the immediate changes resulting from creation of Chicago's local school councils (LSCs), which themselves resulted from a broad constituency-building and advocacy campaign:

> It used to be, before we had local school councils, that in virtually any school, if I went in with a parent, we were accosted immediately as intruders — or maybe not so immediately, because nobody was around. But when they found us and figured out we were there, they would throw us out. And there was this bureaucratic kind of officious inhospitality in virtually every school that you took as a matter of course. And if you asked to speak to the principal, it was like going to the Alderman's office. You could be kept waiting for hours. It was kind of a culture thing across the board in public schools.
>
> And after the LSCs, that just changed dramatically. There were greeters in every school, so that they knew who was coming in and going out of the school, but they were glad to see you. You had to sign in almost immediately, but then they were just helpful and glad to see you. Now the schools where we have problems are the aberrations rather than the rule. ... The fact that a majority parent body was going to control the principal's job just immediately changed the climate. ... Our standards on what is a hospitable environment for parents have gone way up since then. ... It's one of the few instances of spontaneous change that just came as a direct result of the structural change.

Participants emphasize that, although some success might be virtually immediate, making governance policies more inclusive is just the first step of reform; a great deal depends on support for implementation. In participants' experiences, even when school-based management bodies hold broad authority, for instance to end a principal's contract, they are often reluctant to wield it. Whether parents in the body exercise their authority depends greatly on their training and support, particularly from independent organizations that aim to expand parents' power in schools. Furthermore, power imbalances and inequities exist within constituent groups, as well as among them. For instance, including parents on a school council does not ensure that all parents' views are represented. In any governance structure, mechanisms are needed to support and protect minorities' interests. Particularly in multiethnic communities, the parents whose voices are heard, whether on school-based councils or elsewhere, are often the ones who are happiest with the school.

Study participants work at all levels to build support for inclusive governance policies and capacity for implementation of those policies. For example, at the national level, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform has published *Reinventing Central Office,* which draws on reforms implemented in various cities to provide a blueprint for decentralizing district resources, authority, and accountability. Cross City Campaign's school budget leadership project works with local leaders to support district administrators in decentralization and to assist principals, teachers, and parents in planning and managing school resources to improve student outcomes. Parents for Public Schools (PPS) also places a high priority on establishing and supporting implementation of new governance mechanisms at its chapter sites. With funding from the Ford Foundation's Collaborating for Education Reform Initiative, PPS of Jackson, Mississippi, is working with other local groups to build capacity for implementation of the district's new school-based management policy. As one component of the effort, Jackson PPS developed and is providing Ask for More training for site councils in the Lanier High School feeder system. The training emphasizes using data in school improvement and also addresses consensus building, serving as a representative, budgeting, and principal selection. These are just a few examples of the ongoing support study participants provide to constituents, to help them use and expand their power to achieve excellence and equity in public education.

[1] Stone, Clarence N., et al., *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001, pp. 7–8.

[2] Nichols Solomon, Rochelle, "Conquering the Fear of Flying," *Phi Delta Kappan* (September 2000), p. 20.

[3] See Welner, Kevin G., *Legal Rights, Local Wrongs: When Community Control Collides with Educational Equity*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001; Rebell, Michael A. and Robert L. Hughes, "Efficacy and Engagement: The Remedies Problem Posed by *Sheff v. O'Neill* — and Proposed Solution," in *Connecticut Law Review*, University of Connecticut, 29:3 (spring 1997), pp. 1154, 1156.

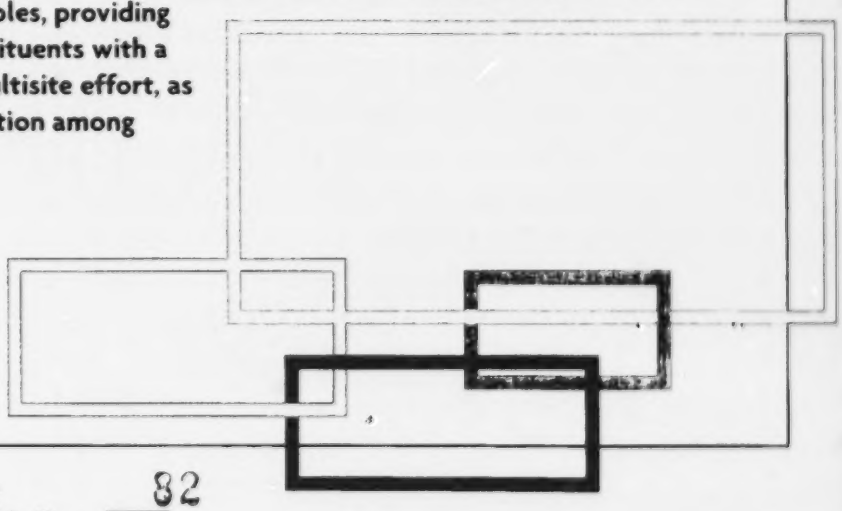
81

Key Functions

Independent constituency-building organizations strive to give constituents and campaigns:

- **Overarching goals. As noted in Chapter 2, all organizations represented in the study share the goals of quality, equitable public education for all children; deep, sustained, and ongoing reform of public education; and democracy in practice. These goals provide a larger context for particular campaigns. Although no organization, constituency, or strategy alone will achieve these goals, organizations assess their effectiveness by examining their progress toward the goals, participants say.**
- **Guiding principles. Participants design constituency-building activities to reflect the same values of equity and democratic decision-making they seek in schools.**
- **Identification with a larger effort. Working as part of a group helps counter what one participant calls "the isolation of the activist" and provides a foundation for building relationships. For example, constituents conducting community walks or meeting with district officials can identify themselves with the organization, gaining a sense of legitimacy and solidarity with others.**
- **Continuity of effort. Organizations provide continuity when individual constituents and staff members move on. Study participants note that organizations also provide continuity in keeping reform agendas before the public, even as issues fall out of fashion, school and political leaders turn over, and social environments change with, for example, a cooling economy or demographic shift. Many longstanding organizations offer institutional memories, skills and experience, deep roots in their communities, established legitimacy and credibility, and a grasp of relevant history and accomplishments — all of which can provide a broader context for both the particular reform effort and the need for reform.**
- **Infrastructure. Organizations seek to provide staff and constituents with mechanisms, arenas, and tools for effective communications, group decision-making, fiscal management, training and capacity building, information, and assessment of current efforts and their context.**

Just as local and state organizations serve these functions with constituents, regional and national organizations play parallel roles, providing local constituency builders and constituents with a sense of being part of an ongoing, multisite effort, as well as infrastructure for communication among sites.



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CHAPTER NINE

Meeting Organizational Challenges

The organizations that study participants work in vary widely in size, staffing, structure, strategies, and constituent makeup.

As they perform key functions, they face numerous challenges, including two cited repeatedly by study participants:

- **Participants strive to develop structures and operations that reflect their principles. They also struggle at times to balance competing goals.**
- **Constituency building for reform entails working amid constant change. Organizations need mechanisms for adapting to changes and integrating lessons learned.**

This chapter first explores these challenges and how organizations, particularly local ones, respond to them. The chapter then examines the role of regional and national organizations, which themselves face these challenges and seek to help local groups cope with them.

Interplay of Principles and Operations

Participants seek to develop organizational structures and operations that embody their guiding principles. In so doing, they sometimes must balance competing goals.

Democratic Decision-Making

Participants work with constituents to create democratic decision-making processes that include diverse constituents, allow everyone to be heard, and, at the same time, are reasonably efficient. A local organizer underscores the importance of "transparent" decision-making, in which the process and outcome are clear to all. Constituent mobility and other factors can make it difficult to both include everyone (given that there are always newcomers) and finalize decisions. A local group director describes how she balances these two needs in a long-term campaign:

> We have been really careful to create a process and structures, with people endowed with authority to make decisions, to formalize and document decisions, so that as there are changes in who is involved, people feel bound by the decisions made before them. It's critical when there's a long process; if every new parent group changed everything, it would never go anywhere.

In other situations, participants find other balances, sometimes slowing the pace to include diverse perspectives. A national group director recounts:

> As we diversify, as we bring in people from backgrounds that have not been at the table before, we have made a conscious commitment to do whatever it takes to bring them up to speed on the issues. Because we know the outcomes are going to be better and stronger and just a much better picture when we do that. And it is not easy. For some it is real frustrating.

A local organizer says that slowing the pace and "periodically disorganizing" also are critical to building new relationships and strengthening existing ones.

Shared Leadership

Study participants say that shared leadership is vital. One dominant personality can exclude other perspectives, ideas, and capacities. Such concentrated leadership also is relatively ineffective. One regional coordinator says, "I tell my parent leaders, 'You can own the work so much that it works against the organization.'" Participants list the downsides of undemocratic processes:

- Concentration of leadership makes processes more susceptible to disruption from turnover. With a broad leadership base, by contrast, the group is well positioned to survive changes.
- A single person carrying the whole load of leadership is likely to burn out.

- Concentration of leadership can splinter a group. A study participant observes, "As soon as someone is called a leader, you can already see the seeds of what will destroy that leader — cynicism, lack of trust."

- If one person has most of the group's contact with education or political leaders, that person can become a "gatekeeper." The gatekeeper's relationships with education or political leaders can become more personal than public, and thus less powerful.

Study participants work with constituent leaders to convey a sense that "they have the responsibility to work with the membership" and "to teach other people to keep the organization alive," as one participant puts it. For example, in helping parents set up a local chapter, Parents for Public Schools encourages them to form a diverse group and share the work from the start. In Texas, the Intercultural Development Research Association's parent networks have rotating leadership, so power and opportunities to develop new skills and confidence are shared.

Balancing Competing Goals

Study discussions reveal a tension inherent in working to build constituent capacity and simultaneously addressing the urgent need for reform. For instance, in the short term, an organization might produce more school change by having staff conduct research, produce advocacy materials, or lobby, rather than invest time in constituent capacity building. However, all study participants share the conviction that constituent capacity is necessary for creating a shared vision, holding systems accountable, and changing power dynamics — vital steps to achieving and sustaining systemic reform. While capacity-building and school-change goals are not inconsistent, they demand that organizations "attend to both means and ends on a continuous basis"[1] and that, at times, competing priorities must be sifted out.

Organizations find various balances between capacity building and immediate reform goals. The way a particular organization strikes a balance is rooted in its mission and other initial decisions, such as those described in Chapter 4 (whether the group's emphasis is on civic capacity building or school change, whether the group is mainly an educational change group that uses multiple strategies or an organizing group that works on multiple issues, and so on). **Funders' expectations also affect the balance.** If a grantor evaluates a group's effectiveness based solely on immediate policy changes, then the group is less able to invest in the constituent capacity that will produce long-term change. Participants emphasize the need for multiple evaluation criteria that include community capacity to achieve and expand reform gains. In addition, participants say short — even three-year — funding cycles do not recognize the need for sustained, long-term efforts.

One area where participants must strike a balance is in defining staff and constituent roles. Groups differ in the degree of leadership staff members are invited or allowed to take in identifying priorities, formulating substantive positions and goals, and devising strategies. Some constituency-building efforts are designed around specific goals, such as upholding particular legal rights or opposing a proposal that staff members have identified as detrimental to quality, equitable education. In those cases, staff members recruit constituents to support that goal and often conduct advocacy themselves. In other organizations, particularly multi-issue organizing groups, each constituent group can set its own priorities. One multi-issue organization director defines the staff role this way: "The organizer brings the parents together to identify goals and strategies and makes sure the plans that parents make get done. ... The organizer constantly recruits new people and keeps the group lively and democratic." Although staff members help constituents shift from personal to systemic perspectives, issues identified by constituents form the starting point for reform.

Constant Change, Experimentation, and Renewal

Constituency building for school reform takes place amid constant change that affects all aspects of the work, from formulating goals and mapping power structures to recruiting constituents and determining the content of training. Changes include educational, policy, and political shifts, as well as turnover among constituents and people in power. These changes place

additional demands on organizations as they seek to maintain continuity, effectiveness, democratic decision-making, and shared leadership. Reform groups continually test and adjust strategies, both to respond to changes and to integrate lessons learned.

Identifying and Responding to Educational, Policy, and Political Changes

Study participants continually analyze the educational, policy, and political contexts of reform. New or exacerbated challenges to schools, such as a deepening shortage of qualified teachers, add to the difficulty of shaping and implementing reform. At the same time, new education policies, proposals, and hot topics can create opportunities, threats, or distractions — or a mix of all three. For example, many participants have long supported standards-based reform, and the approach has garnered increasing support in the past decade. However, while these participants welcome standards as a means for holding schools accountable and identifying improvement needs, some standards initiatives include punitive consequences, not just for schools, but also for students. These participants struggle to argue that certain provisions can hurt students while maintaining support for standards-based reform overall. This paradox requires reformers to shine a spotlight on provisions' details without diverting attention from the broad goal of quality, equitable schools. Nevertheless, just as promising developments can h ld risks, negative developments can present opportunities. For example, a school slated for closure can provide a focal point for recruiting more constituents and engaging them in systemic reform as well as efforts to keep their school open.

Shifts in the political landscape and the makeup of policymaking bodies also can affect the types of policies that are considered. A campaign for big legislative mandates faces slim chances in an era of block grants, and a tax cut can threaten hard-won programs, taking time and attention from new campaigns. A local organizer says constituents must remain vigilant to hang onto their previous gains, even while engaged in new campaigns: "Some of the city council lawyers are trying to roll back the tax rate and cut $16 million. We have an appropriation of $2 million for after-school programs, so we are a prime target."

Adjusting to Changes in the Players

Study participants emphasize the centrality of relationships: "Fundamentally, this is relationship-building work, on human, one-on-one levels," says one. Changes in the players — officials, constituents, and staff — have a huge impact on relationships, and thus on effectiveness.

Educational and Political Leadership

Participants describe frequent turnover at every level of the education system, from state education commissioners and district superintendents to principals and teachers, as well as in political leadership. **Changes in educational and political leadership not only affect policy, as new leaders arrive with their own agendas, but also require repeatedly building relationships anew.** Leadership turnover in education is one of the reasons for building constituencies in the first place; participants seek to engage constituencies that can provide continuity for reform where it is lacking in the education system. However, turnover also constitutes a major challenge, demanding that constituency builders and stakeholders "constantly repaint the picture" of the need for reform, as one participant puts it.

> *"There is a real problem in [our city]. You get an okay from whomever, but then a new person comes in and says it's not okay, and you don't have anything to show that it was approved. We ran everything as a public process, to have it documented and open. ... We got approval every step of the way."*
>
> *— A local organization director*

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School and district leadership changes can be particularly damaging because of the enormous investment often required to establish trust between inside and outside constituencies. One person leaving the school system or moving to another position can cut off constituents' access to that office, information in that office's purview, and others throughout the system (for instance, principals largely control access to teachers and students). The problem is greatest in schools most needing improvement, where students and staff sometimes see multiple principals pass through in a single year. In urban districts facing principal shortages, schools can languish for months under acting principals, who likely have little incentive for developing relationships, particularly with outside constituencies.

Changes in school leadership can result from not only individual moves, but also systemic restructuring. For example, one city recently reshaped its administration from 22 field offices, each aligned with a high school and its feeder schools, to 10 regional offices. When the dust settled, constituents had to figure out where decision-making authority had come to rest and initiate relationships with new regional directors, some of whom had no prior knowledge of reformers' concerns or capacity.

Responding to high turnover in leadership, participants seek to build broad constituency bases and relationships with relatively stable parts of the education establishment, such as teachers, administrative staff, and others who can provide ongoing support and build credibility with incoming leaders. One local organizer tells of an incoming principal being greeted by a leadership team of parents and teachers who had been collaborating for more than a year. The team's cohesiveness, accomplishments, and clear priorities, along with its links to other reform-oriented principals, convinced the new principal to support their work. According to a constituency builder working with the school:

> She talked a lot about how she thought she knew what she was going to do when she went into that school. But she also talked about what she found when she got there, because the school itself had already been organized. ... Even though she didn't come in saying, 'I'm totally willing to do this,' that school's organizing team kind of organized her. What also organized her was this team of principals ... that functions as a collaborative just among the principals themselves.

One local constituency builder points out that turnover among political leadership can have benefits, enabling groups and constituents to shift between confrontational advocacy and collaborative approaches: "The changes in the government make rebalancing possible. In a less fluid environment, we might not have been able to make those adjustments."

Constituents

Constituent mobility is a major challenge for study participants trying to build relationships with and among constituents. Families commonly move as parents seek better jobs, housing, and schools. Constituency building for school reform also faces a natural "aging out" as students progress from elementary school to graduation. In the longer term, demographic shifts can mean major metamorphoses in the ethnic or income makeup of a community. A participant notes that building constituent capacity itself can contribute to constituent turnover:

> A byproduct of parent leadership development is that the parents find confidence and resources, and they can imagine getting out, and they get out — get jobs, get homes elsewhere. One parent got all six of her kids into a charter school. Her heart was [in improving the neighborhood school], but how hard was it going to be? What was it going to take? It's the same with principals; you work with them to build capacity, and they get promoted. The same with classroom teachers; they move up in the system.

Although some constituents leave the particular reform effort, they have gained understanding and skills that benefit their own families and the community as a whole.

Study participants attempt to balance, on one hand, keeping constituents involved and, on the other, continually recruiting new constituents, who bring their

own ideas, talents, and energy to the effort. As discussed in Chapter 5, much of constituency building's core work contributes simultaneously to recruitment and continued engagement. For example, by engaging constituents in collective action, participants try to build a sense of efficacy that contributes to continued engagement and shows potential constituents the need and potential for change.

Staff

Study participants say the need for professional staff can hardly be overstated. Some national organizations encourage, if not require, local groups to have professional staff before becoming members. Yet constituency-building groups from neighborhood to national levels grapple with challenges of attracting and retaining staff. Participants say staff members must share the organization's values and philosophy, demonstrate appropriate language skills and cultural awareness necessary for working with particular populations, and possess a wide range of relationship-building and other skills.

Such skilled people are scarce. Those available might not be satisfied with the relatively low salaries and lack of career ladders at small organizations. In some cases, local groups hire young people, giving them their first full-time jobs and serving as the training ground for reform activists. However, a local constituency builder also notes the difficulty of attracting young people to work on complex, long-term endeavors: **"When I think about the 60s and 70s, the work was more concrete in that we were trying to get entrance into public facilities."** Some participants refer to generational cycles of youth involvement in social change. More young people appear to be entering the field now than in previous years, but participants identify a gap in the generation that would be assuming leadership. A national organization director asks, "Who do we pass the baton to?"

For the most part, study participants' analyses of what keeps staff engaged echo their criteria for keeping constituents engaged. A local organizer puts stock in creating a sense of shared purpose and fellowship in a movement, as well as offering opportunities for learning through guided readings, seminars, and other forums for exchange. Participants cite the importance of regional and national groups in helping meet these needs and providing forums for "re-energizing." Organizations use various strategies for avoiding burnout. For instance, one national group with many local chapters deliberately rotates local organizers among sites, partly to enable organizers to build new relationships and face new challenges and opportunities.

Learning from Experience and Experimentation

Constituency-building groups create mechanisms not only to identify and respond to external changes, but also to help them reflect on their work and make the most of lessons learned. Study participants' conceptions of schools' problems and constituency builders' roles have evolved as they have tackled issues over long periods; developed new relationships; and taken in new research on education, reform, and constituency building. Just as they encourage constituents to reflect on their efforts, participants promote staff reflection and self-assessment as a means to identify new obstacles and opportunities, and integrate and share learning. Mechanisms range from organizationwide evaluation and strategic planning processes to informal meetings and individual journals.

Participants develop and test new strategies as they assess current circumstances and the success of previous work. For example, California Tomorrow's work in Salinas, California, was part of a larger effort to create a strategy that did not depend on principals' leadership, or even support, to promote equity in schools. The strategy focused on identifying "sparks" — staff, parents, or others — who would constitute a stable and committed core advocacy team. The initiative yielded valuable lessons on the types of support constituents need and the importance of working in multiple schools in a district to get at systemic issues. The group now is adapting the strategy to address the education of African American and Latino students in middle schools to

> *"My colleagues who have lasted over time have had connections and reflection."*
>
> *— A local constituency builder*

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learn about various settings and develop the model further.

Reflection and experimentation also play an important role in the long-term development of organizations. Noting the risk of groups becoming "just as cumbersome and difficult" as the structures they seek to change, a national organization director advises:

> One of the obligations of organizations that are around for a period of time is to constantly examine how that mission [to help constituents gain power in schools] plays out in relationship to what's going on in the world and whether or not the strategies that it once thought made sense to achieve them ... still work.

The Role of National and Regional Organizations

Study participants say constituency building is mainly local work. One group director explains: "If people come together locally, they not only can break down the personal barriers but they can start talking about whatever reform topic is on the table in real terms." **National and regional groups provide local groups with tools and resources to enhance local capacity. They also serve some of the same functions with local groups that local groups serve with constituents, particularly providing a sense of common purpose and membership in a larger movement.** In doing so, national groups face some of the same challenges, including working amid constant change and balancing competing goals.

The national and regional groups participating in this study have various types of structures and relationships with local groups. For example, Parents for Public Schools has local chapters that are formed by groups of parents with assistance from the national office. In contrast, members of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students are independent child advocacy groups, each having its own approach and constituency, but all working together toward common goals. Each national organization's structure, relationships, and mission affect how its central office prioritizes needs, delivers assistance, links local groups, and provides leadership. Study organizations seek to balance supporting local work, building a national movement for equitable reform, and, in some cases, conducting national advocacy.

Providing Tools and Resources

Most local groups building constituencies for reform are small, with limited staff and financial resources. By developing tools and resources that can be used by staff and constituents at many sites, national organizations enhance local capacity and reduce duplication of effort. National organizations also disseminate learning from one local site to others in the network, and can draw on resources not available to local groups, such as national experts and support from national foundations.

Study participants from national groups try to develop resources that are generic enough to be used in various settings, yet specific enough to be locally relevant. Common strategies, which often involve designing and piloting materials in collaboration with local groups, include:

- **Producing toolkits for local staff.** For example, the Public Education Network drew on the experiences of four community groups addressing school funding to produce *School Finance Toolkit: How to Create a Community Guide to Your School District's Budget.*
- **Providing train-the-trainer curricula.** Cross City Campaign worked with local members to design and pilot a workbook, *Community Organizing for School Reformers.* Local constituency builders attend training that uses the workbook and then provide the training for parent and community leaders back home.

Leadership Training and Networks

Many study participants from national groups provide leadership training for both local staff and constituent leaders. Training opportunities range from large annual conferences and regional meetings to relatively small meetings on particular reform topics. Some groups offer training for people in particular roles, such as the Public Education Network's annual New Director Institute and the Interfaith Education Network's Principals Network meetings. Participants say these gatherings contribute to a sense of collectivity as well as individual learning. Participants try to model effective educational practice in their training by building on attendees' experiences and integrating peer exchange and small-group

explorations through site visits and discussions of readings or issues.

Using Research and Data

Many study participants from national organizations provide mechanisms that help local constituency builders sort through and use an overwhelming body of education research. These mechanisms include computer databases that catalog and digest information (such as the National Coalition of Advocates for Students' database) and e-mail newsletters (such as the Public Education Network's weekly *NewsBlast*). Some national staffs provide additional guidance, such as helping to analyze local data or, in the case of Interfaith Education Fund, conducting research on constituent-identified issues for local groups.

Resources for Working with Diverse Constituencies

As local groups seek to build capacity and connections among diverse constituencies, national groups develop resources to support those efforts. Many national organizations make their publications more widely accessible by translating them into multiple languages, and even, as in the case of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, translating locally developed materials. Some national organizations go further, working with local groups to test and document new strategies for working with diverse constituencies, as well as developing recommendations for equitable educational practice. Study participants' initiatives include:

- National Coalition of Advocates for Students' Immigrant Students Project and its Asian Families/School Partnership Project;
- Parents for Public Schools' Rural Initiative Project; and
- Public Education Network's Education and Race initiative, in which local education funds convene conversations about education and race.

Support for Inside/Outside Work

Some national organizations, particularly those whose mission includes bringing together multiple stakeholder groups, provide mechanisms to further inside/outside relationships. For instance, in addition to annual meetings, Cross City Campaign holds smaller topical conferences on issues such as performance-based budgeting and high school reform, as well as study visits in which both inside and outside constituents participate. By gathering people away from their home turf, the campaign seeks to move them beyond entrenched positions, help them see each other in new ways, and provide a "safe place" for developing new relationships. Each event includes cross-site exchange and time for members of each site to meet alone. The meetings legitimize the roles of outsiders, as they participate side-by-side with education professionals. Cross City Campaign also has developed inside/outside collaborations to produce resources for various constituencies. For example, the campaign worked with the Seattle School District to develop *Budget Builder* software, available on the Internet, with which school staff and parents can develop the next year's budget, learn how other cities link spending to student outcomes, and create reports for parents and others.

Study participants from local groups also describe the value of national organizations providing cover for local groups by advancing proposals that might draw fire and "taking the heat," enabling local groups to preserve inside/outside relationships.

Organizational Development

National organizations support formation and development of local groups in various ways. Areas of focus are continuous learning and self-assessment. In addition to providing forums for exchange and reflection, many study participants' groups have created materials to help local constituency builders assess their effectiveness, both for internal learning and to demonstrate impact. These materials take various forms:

- Parents for Public Schools provides chapters with a school-quality and parent-involvement assessment guide to help them compare community involvement and student achievement before and after a chapter is formed.
- Public Education Network has provided grants to selected members to build self-evaluation processes.

- Cross City Campaign's Indicators Project has created a framework for examining and documenting the roles of parent and community groups in reform.

Connecting Local Activists in a Larger Movement

Many study participants see the national role as important not only in supporting local efforts, but also in building a national movement that contributes to systemic reform beyond member sites and at all levels, from local to federal.

Building a Sense of Collectivity

Study participants say that a primary role of national and regional groups is providing a sense of membership in a larger movement. Participants emphasize that this service is as important for local staff as for constituents. Multisite conferences and newsletters are two common means of countering isolation and creating a sense of working toward common goals.

Groups also build a sense of collectivity by engaging constituency builders from various sites in joint work, such as developing training resources or hashing out substantive positions. The National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) increasingly uses collaborative projects both to deepen relationships among members and to effectively attack the systemic exclusion of children of color, immigrants, and poor children from quality education. Sixteen national, state, and local members of NCAS joined the national staff to plan and implement Mobilization for Equity (MFE), a five-year project that entailed articulating a students' rights agenda and coordinating constituency building and advocacy. The director of one MFE member group cites the importance of collectivity in rectifying power imbalances and fighting racism and exclusion: "Combining our experiential knowledge from different regions and parts of the system enables us to build a stronger analysis of how … exclusionary agendas are being advanced in the nation."

In addition, just as membership in local groups increases constituents' credibility with other local actors, membership in a larger network or coalition often boosts a local group's credibility and stature.

Providing Leadership

National groups seek to influence the national climate and provide leadership for equitable, systemic reform. A national organization director describes the national climate's impact on local work:

> The climate in which we are doing this is being framed by a whole other constituency and in some ways it's put us in a defensive or a reactionary posture. … What's common in lots of local places is we are doing it in a climate where there are other forces at work that we are constantly having to swat at, that prevent us from getting to the real work that needs to be done, which is fixing schools for all kids.

Through publications, large conferences, and media work, national groups focus attention on reform issues, influence how those issues are framed, and legitimize local work on those issues. National organizations also seek to influence how constituents are perceived. For example, by appearing on *Good Morning America,* a founding member of Parents for Public Schools introduced millions of viewers to a view of parent involvement that puts parents on governing boards, not just behind bake sale tables.

National organizations also provide some of the leadership in their networks or coalitions. They sometimes play the same "agitating" role with local staff that those staff play with constituents. In doing so, they face the same challenge of balancing locally set priorities against the need to broaden perspectives and expand understanding of systemic issues. A national group director describes wanting to provide leadership and tools to help local groups go in new directions, but

> *"The work of constituency building is primarily local, and then it's got to be linked and built so that it has a national resonance."*
>
> *— A national director*

realizing that "you can't just parachute in there and say, 'You really need to do this.'"

The Public Education Network offers local education funds (LEFs) competitive grants for projects in particular areas, such as teacher quality, standards, assessment, and accountability. By asking applicants how the projects would affect their other work, the network helps groups focus on these systemic reform issues beyond the terms of the grants. By requiring matching funds, the network gives LEFs a platform for approaching local funders, a development that might have a positive effect on their grantmaking more generally. In some cases, work done with the grants has provided the basis for guides, such as the network's *School Finance Toolkit*, which are disseminated broadly.

Influencing Federal Policy

Some national groups also seek to shape federal policy. Study participants express a variety of opinions on the role of federal policy, as differences exist even among national actors and among local activists. One national organization director argues for a stronger federal role in education, saying states and districts should be required to meet standards if they receive funding: "The issue of how well somebody ought to be educated in a democracy ought not to be an entirely local issue." Without federal policies, some say, each community must fight every battle alone. Moreover, there are many issues that communities rarely address on their own, most notably racial equity.

In contrast, some local constituency builders express reservations about the federal role, citing previous federal efforts' disappointing results and national discussions that seemed simplistic and detached from local struggles. A local group director cautions that reforms imposed from above often prompt resistance: "You know if we've had trouble with [resistance to state policy], how it plays out negatively in [the state], you just multiply that by hundreds when you go about federal policy." Another local group director argues that the United States lacks the type of robust, substantive discussion at the national level that should accompany federal policy development. "At this point I am not sure that we have a good process for the national conversation. I think there's been some progress being made at the local levels and at the state level on a process for having these conversations. It seems to me that the national ones are pretty empty." Others disagree. The question of the effectiveness of federal policy remains the subject of debate within many networks. However, even local activists critical of federal mandates say that the leadership and support provided by national organizations to constituency builders and other reformers is crucial to their local work and to building a national movement.

[1] *Voices from the Field*, a study of comprehensive community initiatives, describes the tension between a) seeking to catalyze and support mechanisms for neighborhood residents and others to foster and sustain neighborhood change and b) seeking to produce broad and measurable changes in quality of life. Kubisch, Anne C., et al., *Voices from the Field: Learning from the Early Work of Comprehensive Community Initiatives*, Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, 1997, p. 9.

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Part III

Conclusion

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusion

Through the ongoing efforts of study participants and many others, the struggle for quality, equitable public education increasingly has become the work of a broad group of public schools' constituents. Families and communities are asserting their place at the decision-making table and demanding reform. These and other stakeholders are showing that they care deeply about the education system — not just for their own children, but as a central institution in the lives of our nation's children.

Families, community groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations have demonstrated that ordinary people can be a powerful force for education reform. They are using their rights of free speech and free assembly and their votes to hold the system accountable in communities and states across the country. They are collaborating with educators to set standards, recruit qualified teachers for low-performing schools, and create new policies and programs. Educators, too, are showing that they can assume powerful new roles. Teachers are leading schoolwide reforms, principals are partnering with community groups to support parent participation in decision-making, and superintendents are collaborating with community members to develop new visions for their school systems.

Fostering and supporting this movement are constituency-building organizations, which provide mechanisms and arenas through which individuals can learn more about the education system, acquire new skills, develop relationships, and take on new roles. Independent constituency-building groups are showing a way, possibly the only way, to sustain systemic reform. Their contributions include:

- building understanding and a sense of shared interest in quality, equitable schools;
- creating political will and holding public education institutions accountable; and
- changing roles, relationships, and power dynamics.

As they help further school reform, constituency builders illustrate a larger lesson about the ways public institutions function in a democracy. Although study participants say they often use a particular crisis or issue as a starting point, their work, at heart, is not a short-term response to specific problems or particular circumstances. It is an effort to change the way this institution functions in the long term — how decisions are made, whose voices are heard, and whose interests are considered. Some participants are doing so by building civic capacity broadly, forging relationships among diverse populations, and facilitating their pursuit of common goals. Others are doing so by supporting families previously excluded from quality education; making real not only the promise of equal treatment in schools, but also the promise of an equal voice in the functioning of public institutions. In both cases, by strengthening the public's role in public education, constituency builders and constituents are strengthening schools, communities, and the practice of democracy.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Profiles of Participating Organizations

All of the groups are private nonprofit organizations. All are independent and nonpartisan. Titles and affiliations are those at the time of the study.

Austin Interfaith

1301 S. IH 35, Ste. 313
Austin, TX 78741
(512) 916-0100
Study participant: Claudia Santamaria, Education Co-Chair

Austin Interfaith is a multiethnic, multi-issue group of over 40 religious congregations and schools from the Austin area. Affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, it seeks to give ordinary citizens a structure through which they can negotiate effectively with the government and private institutions that affect their lives. Austin Interfaith is the vehicle through which member institutions defend the interests of their families and their local communities, helping these congregations and schools become an effective force for promoting democratic values and traditions. It accomplishes these goals by:

- Conducting individual and small group meetings with clergy and lay leaders.
- Conducting workshops to train congregation and school representatives in how to understand and affect local and regional political processes.
- Developing a large leadership core from those representatives.
- Identifying issues of concern to all sectors of the community.
- Strengthening relationships within and among member institutions.
- Forging alliances across the lines of religion and ethnicity to develop a broad-based shared vision for the Austin area.
- Moving that vision into a multi-issue, action-oriented agenda for the organization.

Austin Interfaith's education reform work is part of the Alliance Schools Project, which is described under Interfaith Education Fund.

California Tomorrow

1904 Franklin St., Ste. 300
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 496-0220
www.californiatomorrow.org
Study participant: Laurie Olsen, Executive Director
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee as a member of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students' Mobilization for Equity

California Tomorrow is dedicated to building a strong and fair multiracial, multicultural, multilingual society that is equitable for everyone. Through advocacy, research, and technical assistance, it strives to:

- Help people understand the complex issues of equity and diversity in new ways.
- Help institutions be fair and responsive to diversity and to build on diversity as a strength.
- Help people work together across racial/ethnic groups, professional roles, and communities to advocate for building institutions and policies that are inclusive and meet the needs of a diverse society.

Since 1986, California Tomorrow has built a strong body of research and a national reputation for facilitating institutional change processes and the challenging dialogue such change demands about intergroup relations, institutional oppression, equity, and access. California Tomorrow works with schools, family-serving institutions, early childhood programs, and communities to respond positively and equitably to diverse populations. It identifies and designs new

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models of practice for a diverse society — and guides and supports the work required to implement these models. California Tomorrow disseminates the learnings of this work through publications, long-term partnerships, presentations, and technical assistance. As a state-focused organization, it works in partnership with local organizations to build the capacity of families and communities to work together to improve the quality of life. It also convenes people around specific concerns and issues. California Tomorrow engages in advocacy aimed at furthering an equity agenda, fighting exclusion, and promoting policies that build upon diversity as a national strength.

Center for Professional Collaboration

Lincoln Memorial University
Cumberland Gap Parkway
Harrogate, TN 37752
(423) 869-6231
www.lmunet.edu/cpc
Study participant: Connie Wright, Director

Housed in Lincoln Memorial University's School of Education, the Center for Professional Development promotes school-community connections and preservice and continuing education for educators. The center's programs emphasize collaboration, linkages to surrounding Appalachian communities, and multicultural education. By partnering with local schools, the center seeks to provide quality placements for teachers-in-training and to serve as a catalyst for change. (The center director participated in the Prichard Committee's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership.)

Charlotte Advocates for Education

Formerly the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation
2 Wachovia Center
301 S. Tryon St., Ste. 1725
Charlotte, NC 28282
(704) 335-0100
www.advocatesfored.org
Study participant: Tom Bradbury, President

Charlotte Advocates for Education (CAE) was established in 1991 as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation by a group of key business and community leaders who had a vision for cultivating private support for local public education. Since that time, CAE has worked to build citizen awareness and understanding of the need for high quality public education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and to define the issues and advocate for the changes required to improve permanently the quality of public education in Mecklenburg County.

In 1998, CAE and six partners received a planning grant from the Ford Foundation's Collaborating for Education Reform Initiative (CERI), which seeks to help urban districts develop K–16 collaborative partnerships that have the leverage to create sustainable systemic educational reform. The partnership won an implementation grant and is developing strategies for lasting systemic reform. In addition, CAE conducts an annual comprehensive survey of community attitudes, perceptions, and expectations regarding public education — *The Annual Community Assessment*. It also conducts and disseminates budget analysis, using its *Community Guide to the School Budget* as a community primer on the complex issue of school finance.

Chicago ACORN

650 S. Clark, Ste. 200
Chicago, IL 60605
(312) 939-7488
www.acorn.org
Study participant: Madeline Talbott, Executive Director

ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is a community organization that fights for positive changes in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods. In recent years, Chicago ACORN has won campaigns on children's health insurance, raising the minimum wage, exposing predatory lenders, and improving public education. ACORN operates the Grassroots School Improvement Campaign (GSIC) in partnership with the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and the Small Schools Workshop of the University of Illinois at Chicago. GSIC brings the experience and wisdom of parent and community residents into schools, so that they can play key roles in improving classroom learning. Parents participate in training workshops, visit quality schools, and learn about such issues as teacher recruitment and retention. GSIC seeks to create a movement for school reform in four Chicago neighborhoods.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

407 S. Dearborn St., Ste. 1500
Chicago, IL 60605
(312) 322-4880
www.crosscity.org
Study participant: Anne C. Hallett, Executive Director
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee

Founded in 1993, Cross City Campaign (CCC) is a national network of school reform leaders from nine cities: Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Seattle. CCC works to include a diverse group of people — parents, community members, teachers, principals, central office administrators, researchers, union officials, and funders — in all of its programmatic work. Its mission is to promote the systemic transformation of urban public schools, resulting in improved quality and equity, so that all urban youth are well prepared for postsecondary education, work, and citizenship. CCC works toward three goals: 1) to build local and national constituencies to advance systemwide urban school reform; 2) to improve systemwide policies and practices on teaching and learning, accountability, and school-site authority; and 3) to strengthen the roles of parents and community members as full-school reform partners.

CCC supports efforts to create high-quality schools that ensure educational success for all urban young people. It advocates policies and practices that move authority, resources, and accountability to the school level, reconnect schools with their community, and completely rethink the role of school districts. It is committed to public schools that challenge and inspire all students to achieve high standards. CCC's work is founded in the belief that urban public schools, thus transformed, can be restored to the public trust.

Intercultural Development Research Association

5835 Callaghan Rd., Ste. 350
San Antonio, TX 78228
(210) 444-1710
www.idra.org
Study participant: Aurelio Montemayor, Lead Trainer
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee as a member of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students' Mobilization for Equity

Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates the right of every child to a quality education. For almost 30 years, IDRA has worked for excellence and equity in education in Texas and across the United States. IDRA conducts research and development activities; creates, implements, and administers innovative education programs; and provides teacher, administrator, and parent training and technical assistance.

IDRA is a member of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS). As part of NCAS's Mobilization for Equity project, IDRA supports Families United for Education — Getting Organized (FUEGO), a network of parents who can effectively use systems advocacy strategies at the national, state, and local levels to ensure key student rights for their children. IDRA provides FUEGO with parent leadership for the development of state and local policy initiatives and programs that reflect the wishes and concerns of minority families in educational access and excellence for children. Policy areas have included bilingual education, immigrant students, school finance, equity, vouchers, and school accountability. The project seeks to build public will for a powerful equity agenda by training substantial numbers of parents and families of excluded school-aged children and by building capacity of organizations in their communities to understand 1) the root causes of their children's school exclusion; 2) how exclusion would end if schools provided necessary student rights; and 3) how systems advocacy strategies must be employed to achieve this equity agenda.

97 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Interfaith Education Fund

1106 Clayton Ln., Ste. 120W
Austin, TX 78723
(512) 459-6551
Study participant: Carrie Laughlin, Researcher
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee

Founded in 1989, the Interfaith Education Fund (IEF) provides research, training, technical, and organizing support to community organizations in the Southwestern United States. These local groups are members of the Industrial Areas Foundation, a national network of broad-based, multiethnic, interfaith organizations in primarily poor and moderate income communities. They seek to renew their local democracies by fostering the competence and confidence of ordinary citizens so that they can reorganize the relationships of power and politics and restructure the physical and civic infrastructure of their communities. IEF has assisted local groups on issues such as public education reform, water and sewer infrastructure for the *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border, job training and economic development, and leadership training.

IEF entered education reform with the goals of creating communities of learners, bringing parents into the life of their children's schools, reshaping the culture of those schools, and organizing a broad constituency for lasting public school reform. A major component of IEF's education reform effort is the Alliance Schools Project, which is a partnership between the Texas education department, IEF, the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation Network, schools, school districts, and parents. Schools join the initiative through a process of extended conversations among and between school staff, parents, and community leaders. The school staff and parents make a commitment to work with the local organization to restructure their campus. By participating in the network, schools can compete for supplemental state funding and can use an expedited process for obtaining state regulatory waivers. The Alliance Schools Project began in 1992 with 32 schools and has grown to over 150 schools.

The Metropolitan Organization

3400 Montrose, Ste. 907
Houston, TX 77006
(713) 807-1429
Study participant: Joe Higgs, Lead Organizer

The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) is an interfaith and interracial coalition of Houston congregations and schools dedicated to teaching ordinary citizens how to participate in the decisions that affect their families, congregations, and communities. A member of the Industrial Areas Foundation, TMO consists of congregations and other institutions that serve people of diverse ethnic and racial origins, incomes, and locations throughout the Harris County area.

TMO works on a multi-issue agenda that comes from hundreds of individual and small-group conversations that occur among the leaders of member institutions. Leaders have worked on winning a city council investment of $1 million to create after-school enrichment activities at 50 schools in low-income communities; creating "Safe Zones" around schools by organizing parents to work for improved traffic safety, code enforcement, and cooperation with police; developing a means for willing workers to obtain the long-term job training they need to earn a just and living wage; improving drainage and streets in long-neglected areas; and organizing citizenship training for 4,000 legal residents to learn the English language, history, and civics necessary to become U.S. citizens. TMO's education reform work is part of the Alliance Schools Project, which is described under Interfaith Education Fund.

National Coalition of Advocates for Students

P.O. Box 218
Boston, MA 02134
(617) 734-0363
www.ncasboston.org
Study participant: Joan First, Executive Director
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee

The National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) is a national network of 20 child advocacy organizations that work to improve access to quality public education for children who are most vulnerable to academic failure. NCAS and its member organiza-

tions build constituencies for fairer public schools by litigating, educating policymakers and other stakeholders about the impact of local, state, and federal policies upon constituent children and families; educating students and family members to understand their legal rights; supporting community-based organizations as they build their capacity to effectively advocate for public schools that are responsive to the needs of low-income children and families; and training and organizing family members and community leaders so that they may become skilled, well-informed participants in local school improvement processes.

NCAS's national staff also develops and implements programs and activities to support the academic and life success of constituent children and families, especially in the area of adolescent and child health. Finally, the national staff provides a variety of supports and assistance to NCAS member organizations to strengthen their capacity to work effectively in their own states and localities. NCAS's Mobilization for Equity constituency building for school reform project was a five-year collaboration of national staff and 16 of NCAS's member organizations. NCAS is governed by a national board of directors chaired by Dr. Beverly Glenn, director, the Hamilton Fish Institute, George Washington University. NCAS's national headquarters is in Boston. NCAS also maintains a field office in El Paso and a staff presence in Florida.

Parents for Public Schools

1520 N. State St.
Jackson, MS 39202
(800) 880-1222
Rural Initiative Project: (888) 245-2376
www.parents4publicschools.com
Study participants: Kelly Allin Butler, Executive Director, and Amina Shahid-El, Regional Director, Rural Initiative Project
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee

Parents for Public Schools (PPS) is a national organization of community-based chapters working to recruit families back to public schools, create more meaningful ways for parents to be involved in the improvement of public schools, and advocate for communitywide support and accountability. PPS's constituency embodies all community stakeholders; public school parents/PPS members are the bridge to each of these in connecting them to the schools. Local PPS chapters are community based. Each chapter has distinct goals, but all chapters are encouraged to have five areas of work: districtwide involvement and systemic change; school improvement; public awareness and communitywide advocacy; school recruitment; and chapter membership. Chapters have led district-level efforts to address overcrowding, improve teacher quality, tackle teacher shortages, strengthen professional development, and institute school-based decision-making that includes parents. PPS has chapters in over a dozen states.

The PPS national office disseminates information about its model for organizing parents, provides technical assistance to local chapters, encourages higher standards for parent involvement, and develops new strategies for addressing emerging needs. PPS assists chapters in dealing with the media and in grantwriting and donor research, and it is developing a guidebook and training on site-based management. PPS's Rural Initiative Project endeavors to replicate its successful model of parent involvement throughout the rural south. In addition to supporting local work, PPS seeks to build a national presence and voice for public school parents.

Parents for Public Schools of Jackson

1520 North State St.
Jackson, MS 39202
(601) 353-1335
www.parents4publicschools.com/jackson
Study participant: Charles Lindsay, Past President

The founding chapter of Parents for Public Schools began in 1989 when 20 parents gathered to consider the impact their collective involvement in the schools might have. They were convinced then, and remain convinced today, that the best way to support public schools is to enroll their children and commit to improving their schools shoulder to shoulder with all parents. They began by recruiting, one by one and through information sessions in their homes, to cultivate a new sense of the importance of strong public schools to the community and a renewed awareness of the sound education being offered in the public schools of Jackson. These efforts created a racial balance in four targeted primary schools in northeast Jackson and were followed by the

passage of a $35 million bond issue — the first since desegregation.

Beginning in 1995, Jackson PPS has advocated site-based management. In 1999, the school board enacted a policy requiring each school to form a broad-based site council. That same year, Jackson PPS began the Ask for More Collaborative, which includes schools, community organizations, families, and the local college's principals institute. Funded by the Ford Foundation's Collaborating for Education Reform Initiative, the collaborative seeks to raise student achievement, in part by providing extensive training for school site councils.

Philadelphia Education Fund

7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Ste. 700
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1294
(215) 665-1400
www.philaedfund.org
Study participant: Rochelle Nichols Solomon, Director of School and Community Partnerships

The Philadelphia Education Fund helps to improve the quality of public education for all children in Philadelphia. Through many initiatives, including direct student services, professional development for teachers and administrators, public engagement, research, and policy recommendations, the fund contributes to ensuring that all children can be successful in postsecondary education and beyond. The fund is affiliated with the Cross City Campaign.

The fund is a member of the Public Education Network. As a local education fund, one of the fund's primary goals is to re-energize community support for public education. Two major strategies are employed to accomplish this work: 1) providing objective research and information to the policymaking community and the community at large, and 2) organizing grassroots efforts to increase support for and participation in public education. Current public engagement activities include Principal for a Day, designed to involve business, political, and civic leaders in the real life of schools and increase support for public education; the Coalition of Education Organizations, a group composed of the leaders of the city's professional education organizations that seeks to educate and build consensus among educators for improving schools; and the Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership, a statewide, grassroots initiative to build a strong coalition of policymakers, community organizations, and individuals who will advocate for the state resources needed for all children to reach high standards.

Portland Schools Foundation

516 SE Morrison, Ste. 1200
Portland, OR 97214
(503) 234-5404
www.thinkschools.org
Study participant: Cynthia Guyer, Director

The Portland Schools Foundation is an independent, community-based organization that mobilizes the money, leadership, new ideas, and political support necessary to ensure a first-rate public education for every child, in every school, in every Portland neighborhood. The fund uses a three-part integrated strategy to achieve change: 1) strategic funding initiatives support innovative teaching and provide the venture capital needed for improvement in whole schools and across the district; 2) leadership and advocacy initiatives mobilize the community to meet the needs of students and teachers, from creating new partnerships to securing stable, adequate funding; and 3) community and parent engagement initiatives tap into the talent, resources, and energy in the community to help create great schools for all students in Portland's public schools. Community and parent engagement initiatives address principal leadership, partnerships, school-based leadership development, and data and accountability. In addition, the foundation is participating in the redesign of Portland's high schools to create better, more inclusive learning communities. The foundation is a member of the Public Education Network.

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

P.O. Box 1658
Lexington, KY 40588-1658
(859) 233-9849 or (800) 928-2111
www.prichardcommittee.org
Study participants: Robert Sexton, Executive Director, and Lutricia Woods, Community Support Coordinator
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee

The Prichard Committee is a citizens group generating support for education improvements for all Kentuckians. During the 1980s, the committee advocated for comprehensive reform legislation. In 1990, following litigation brought by the state's poorer districts, the legislature enacted the Kentucky Education Reform Act, after which the committee shifted its work to monitoring and supporting state and local reform implementation. The committee's principal tasks now are 1) to inform the public through speaking engagements, publications, media work, and provision of input (upon invitation) to the Department of Education and the legislature; and 2) to mobilize parents and others who have an interest in quality education and to help them to take active roles in supporting and furthering reform.

The committee sponsors research and has published citizen guides on school law, school-based decision-making, finance, and the primary school program. It also produces a quarterly newsletter and a monthly newspaper column. Staff answer questions on a toll-free telephone line. The committee works with local parents and citizens through its regional staff and the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, a portable six-day training curriculum designed to foster an army of concerned citizens who will work to defend and improve the reforms for all the years necessary to put them in place. In collaboration with KSA-Plus Communications, the committee has formed Parent Leadership Associates, which provides education leaders and communities across the country with customized consulting and training services, as well as materials that help parents better understand how to improve schools.

Public Education Network

601 13th St. NW, Ste. 900N
Washington, DC 20005-3808
(202) 628-7460
www.publiceducation.org
Study participant: Wendy Puriefoy, President
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee

The mission of the Public Education Network (PEN) is to build public demand and mobilize resources for quality public education for all children through a national constituency of local education funds (LEF) and individuals. PEN works to educate the nation about the relationship between school quality and the quality of community and public life. It is based on the belief that equal opportunity, access to quality public schools, and an informed citizenry are all critical components of a democratic society. PEN's goal is to ensure that the availability of high-quality public education is every child's right and not a privilege. PEN's work is founded on the belief that improving public school systems is the responsibility of parents, individual citizens, and whole communities. Students, teachers, and school districts all need to be held to high standards. The network advocates for significant changes in how school systems are funded; overhauling curriculum and assessment practices; ensuring authority and decision-making at the school level; providing ongoing professional development for teachers; and engaging the public in building relationships between citizens, schools, and the communities they serve.

PEN is a national association of LEFs advancing school reform in low-income communities across the country. LEFs are nonprofit community-based organizations dedicated to increasing student achievement in public schools and building broad-based support for quality public education. They are independent of the school districts in which they operate, have boards reflective of their communities, are professionally staffed, and work with public school systems serving a significant population of low-income, at-risk students. LEFs collaborate with school principals, teachers, administrators, boards and districts, businesses, community organizations, and local citizens to develop and

101
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implement whole-school improvement strategies, create model programs, leverage resources, award grants, and enhance the standing of public schools in the community. Active in 31 states and the District of Columbia, PEN's 77 LEF members serve more than 10.6 million children in over 16,000 schools and 1,200 school districts.

Senior High Alliance of Principals, Presidents, and Educators

1340 Ingraham St., NW
Washington, DC 20011
(202) 723-3310
cathy.reilly@verizon.net
Study participant: Cathy Reilly, Coordinator

The Senior High Alliance of Principals, Presidents, and Educators (SHAPPE) is an organization of the 17 public senior high school principals and parent leaders in Washington, D.C. It has been meeting since February 1998. The members originally came together to share their frustration and grief at the level of violence in their schools and have evolved into a group working to end the isolation of parents and school-based educators.

SHAPPE is establishing a forum for parents and principals to strategically influence policies and budget decisions that impact the city's teenagers. It is also promoting an equitable standard of resources and services among the schools. SHAPPE is functioning as a support group for parents who have felt inadequate and poorly informed. The active participation by the strongest principals in the city has meant the group has stayed grounded in the issues directly affecting the schools and in raising student achievement. SHAPPE is facilitating partnerships between parents and principals of the 17 high schools, between the local senior highs and the central administration, and between the public schools and private and public agencies and entities that can influence the effectiveness of DC high schools. SHAPPE often works with the 21st Century School Fund.

21st Century School Fund

2814 Adams Mill Rd., NW
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 745-3745
www.21csf.org
Study participant: Mary Filardo, Director
Ford Foundation Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative grantee

The 21st Century School Fund was founded on the premise that communities are responsible for creating healthy, safe, and educationally appropriate learning environments. Its mission is to build the public will and capacity to improve urban public school facilities. When the fund was created in 1994, the DC Public Schools infrastructure was failing. Many schools were threatened with closure due to low enrollment. Many schools did, in fact, close temporarily due to fire code violations and degrading facilities. The fund was established to help develop the first facilities master plan in two decades and to support the parents and community members of the Oyster Elementary School who were working to build a new school for their neighborhood. Through its work on these projects, the fund amassed information and expertise on the needs and challenges facing public schools and their communities, and developed skill in understanding and navigating public policy and federal and local government laws. It also developed its own data management and dissemination software programs, Format-PRO® and DCSchoolSearch.com, publications, and training tools.

Since 1995, the fund has expanded its focus from the District of Columbia to include the District and urban communities nationwide. In the District of Columbia, the fund continues to work directly with the community, school district personnel, and individual public officials on building the DC Public Schools infrastructure. Nationally it provides technical assistance, training, and tools to nonprofit organizations; school districts; and local, state, and federal public agencies to support their work on school facility issues. Its work is guided by a vision that one day good public schools will be both a reasonable expectation and a reality in school districts throughout the nation.

Washington Parent Group Fund

706 W. Fourth St., NE
Washington, DC 20002
Study participant: Jerald Woody, Sr., President

The Washington Parent Group Fund (WPGF) is a coalition of involved parents, concerned business and community leaders, and forward-looking public school administrators. WPGF's mission is to "promote quality education for children through the empowerment of parents." For 15 years, WPGF has enriched the lives of thousands of the District's students through more than 1,200 projects in over 70 schools. Through its member schools, WPGF supports a network of more than 3,000 parents, affording them the opportunity to interact, learn skills, and gain the confidence they need to be effective advocates for their children. WPGF's four major program areas are Educational Enrichment, Technical Assistance and Training, Parent Training and Leadership Development Institute, and Comprehensive School Health. WPGF often works with the 21st Century School Fund.

APPENDIX B

Notes on the Study Design

The Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform (CBPSR) Initiative aimed to mine the experiences of initiative participants and share that knowledge among participants and, more broadly, among school reform practitioners, researchers, and funders. This report focuses on understanding how grantees build informed, skilled constituencies who are active in creating quality, equitable schools for all children.

Study Components

The study was conducted by a partnership of researchers from the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. The research team, including Janice Hirota of Chapin Hall, Lauren Jacobs of AED, and Jean Thomases, a consultant, implemented a study design meant to foster sharing among participants and provide insights for broader dissemination. **The aim of the discussions was never to reach consensus on any issue. Instead, the researchers tried to understand constituency building through the various organizational and personal viewpoints of study participants.** In order to accomplish these aims, the design components included:

- **A study group of 21 practitioners.** The group included the seven CBPSR constituency-building grantees. In addition, each grantee representative, working in a national, regional, or state-level organization, selected two colleagues, most from local members or affiliated groups, to participate in the study. The participating organizations and individuals, listed in Chapter 1, are located in sites across the country.

- **Multiple venues for discussion among study participants.** Over two years, participants met in two in-person convenings of the entire group; multiple structured telephone conversations; and, in one instance, a convening of a subgroup of participants.

- **Facilitated structured conversations.** The researchers polled participants regarding a variety of possible subjects for exploration through a constituency-building lens. The three subjects of most interest formed the basis of ongoing conversations over the two years. The subjects were *long-term goals and vision, building parent constituencies across diverse communities,* and *inside/outside strategies.* Study participants were placed according to their preferences into one of three groups, each of approximately seven members; each group focused on one discussion topic throughout the study.

  Most of the discussions occurred during conference calls of 1.5 hours each. Each group had three or four calls that involved the seven participants and three researchers. The researchers facilitated these discussions, noted important topics as they arose, and had the calls taped and transcribed. Before the first call, the researchers sent out a list of questions for exploration. Before each subsequent call, the researchers sent out a working memo that summarized the major themes of the previous call, including differing perspectives and goals, and raised questions for further discussion.

- **Individual interviews.** The researchers conducted two or more individual telephone interviews with each study participant to talk in greater detail about the constituency-building strategies, goals, and specific examples of school reform efforts of the organization.

- **Review of materials and literature.** The researchers reviewed reports, mission statements, program descriptions, relevant media coverage, and other materials of participants and other constituency-building efforts. The researchers also conducted a review of relevant literature.

- **Participation in Ford Foundation convenings.** During the life of the initiative, CBPSR grantees participated in two Foundation-sponsored convenings a year, where the study researchers inter-

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acted with and heard grantees, including the grantee study participants, discuss a range of school reform and constituency-building issues.

- **Review of report drafts.** Study participants met in person to discuss an early draft of the report with the researchers and also provided comments on a later version.

Design Benefits and Challenges

The major strength and challenge of the study arose from the same source: the range of participants and their broad geographic dispersal. The study included organizations and individuals that work at local, state, regional, and national levels, and in urban and rural sites across the country. Participants employed different constituency-building strategies toward varied goals, and thus brought different perspectives and insights to the study table. Such diversity — coupled with participants' ability to reflect upon and articulate their experiences — was the foundation for rich and complex conversations. These are reflected in the report.

At the same time, such range and dispersal created challenges for the study. As researchers, we wanted to create dialogue among participants, not simply conduct one-on-one interviews with them or make site visits. The latter methods would allow researchers to interact first-hand with participants, but they would not be interacting with each other. However, it was not feasible to bring people together for multiple convenings for a number of reasons. The monetary cost was always a consideration, of course, but equally important were the already busy schedules of participants. We floated the idea of a listserv, but several participants said they would not engage in such an effort, a poor choice in any case because of the lack of personal connection.

Taking into consideration the strengths and drawbacks of the options for group interaction, we chose a mix of in-person and telephone discussions: studywide convenings at the start and end of the study and a series of conference calls among subgroups of participants. The constituency builders generously made time for these calls and all participants received summaries of all calls, allowing for a sense of the conversational directions across the groups. In the end, however, all of us — participants and researchers alike — found the conference calls to be poor substitutes for face-to-face interaction and comfortable familiarity of in-person conversations. All participants, except the researchers, were in different locales for the calls, which inhibited the pace and flow of conversations as well. In addition, the need to limit the calls often made it difficult to pursue and extend points the way one could, for example, at a daylong meeting. Even so, we were able to discuss promising strategies, differing approaches, and quandaries as we covered such topics as the roles of parents and students in school reform, the role of principals, the development of long-term "stayers" and local leadership, and the roles and at times tensions of professional constituency-building work.

Findings about the Research Design

As researchers, we gained enormously from the individual and group perspectives voiced on every call. The multiple in-person, conference call, and interview discussions with the reformers emphasized two broad findings rooted in the study methodology:

- **First, activists have a great deal to teach.** But they do not always have the time, place, and audience for articulating and exploring insights about what they have learned through their work. Despite limitations, the study convenings and discussions provided such a place and audience.

- **Second, the exchange among practitioners revealed issues that might not have surfaced through more typical research methodologies.** As researchers, we were able to listen in on informed inquiry as peers asked for clarification, extended each other's points, and sometimes challenged one another. Conversations went in directions and opened areas of exploration that we might not have discovered if we were working in one-on-one situations. The thematic summaries allowed us to sum up and articulate discussion themes; test them with participants in follow-up calls and interviews; and eventually highlight, in the report, major aspects, strategic value, achievements, and challenges of joining constituency building and school reform work

We hope the report allows others to enter into participants' experiences and share in their knowledge.

Bibliography

This report relies primarily on the work and insights of the 21 practitioners who participated in the Constituency Building Study. Appendix A profiles their organizations and provides contact information. Each organization publishes materials to aid constituents and constituency builders, as well as reports for broader audiences. Participants' publications were invaluable in the preparation of this report, and many are cited within the report. It is not feasible to include all of them here, and we encourage readers to obtain publications lists from participants' Web sites and offices. This bibliography primarily includes publications from outside the study group.

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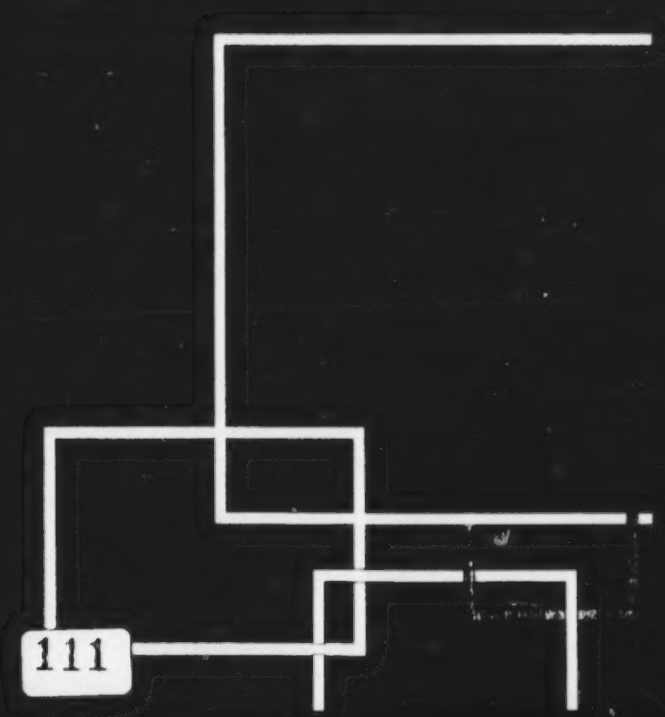

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